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ROTHERY SELFERT, Q.C.

A Nobel.

BY JOHN OLLIVE,

AUTHOR OF "A WOOING OF ATÉ."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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ROTHERY SELFERT, Q.C.



CHAPTER I.

ENVY may be a deficiency or an excrescence, a vice or even a virtue, according to the nature of the man in whose mind it has reached a more or less intelligible development. In the mind of Hurst Atlee it was a simple fungus, induced by the circumstances which had gone to comfort the last ten years of his life, just as surely as other fungi owe their being to damp and darkness. Among the circumstances to which its unpleasant growth was due, Rothery Selfert was one of the most accidental; and it was almost by chance, so to speak, that Atlee grudged the successful barrister his six or eight thousand

a year. It had become an absolute necessity to his mind to grudge something to somebody, and Rothery Selfert offered it a convenient subject on which to fasten. When he had something which he could grudge to himself, no doubt the tenacity of his mental grip would be relaxed.

Hurst Atlee was alone in the world, to begin with, without either ascendants or descendants in the direct line to distract his attention ; but as his mother had been dead ten years, and his father twenty, it may be presumed that the desolation of orphancy had been somewhat assuaged by time, and that he had ceased to go about envying other people their fathers and mothers. He had, in fact, almost reached that stage of life at which it is more probable that a man is an orphan than that he is not, and had grown more accustomed every day to seeing his contemporaries in a similar state of bereavement. Whether or not the fact, that he was not yet in a position to contemplate the possibility of

future orphans being created by his own decease, pressed very heavily on his mind, was more doubtful; but such considerations are not generally wont to depress very seriously the minds of men who have just attained even their thirty-first birthdays. It was certainly the fact that Hurst Atlee had met with what is commonly called a "disappointment," and though the depression thereby caused was five or six years old, the elasticity available for the purpose had not yet enabled him to make a complete recovery. Most unmarried men of thirty are in the habit of saying that they have only been in love once in their lives, and Hurst Atlee could make the assertion with as much truth as the majority. He had been injudicious enough to select for this experience the year in which he was called to the bar—the year than which perhaps no other of his life was less applicable to such purposes—and the consequences had been quite as unfortunate as might rationally have been expected from his temerity. Nelly

Ratcliff, whom he had known more or less intimately ever since he was a schoolboy of fifteen, and who was quite as charming a girl as most of those generally selected for the objects of a first *grande passion*, had been quite willing to walk off into fairyland with him at once, if the preliminary gates and other obstacles had not been too difficult to surmount. Unfortunately, however, there had been obstacles, over which, even with his assistance, she was not able immediately to climb; and though Nelly's dusky fragrant hair was like tangled silk, and her eyes as sweet and truth-speaking as ever laughed a man's reason away, she had not strength of mind enough to contemplate the possibility of waiting until a slower process had cleared the path for them both. So Nelly, instead of walking into fairyland, went off to Canada with her uncle instead, and was ultimately led into the other wonderful region by a rather bald Canadian judge, who had been there twice before, and may be presumed to

have been a safer guide through its mazes than one less acquainted with its intricate geography. Nelly made her bald conductor an excellent wife, and the Canadian census had no reason to complain of the judicial choice, but Hurst Atlee had not forgotten the fragrance of Nelly's hair yet.

It need hardly be said that the want of money (which is quite as often the root of all evil as the presence of that commodity in our day, however it may have been with the Ephesians) was one of the difficulties which frightened Nelly out of the path down which her feet were longing to wander; and there was already, in truth, a sufficient drain upon Hurst Atlee's pockets to have justified a little caution before making any further demands upon so doubtful a source of supply. It has been said that the young barrister was alone in the world, but that statement was not strictly correct, as there was an establishment down in Clapham, of quite unexceptionable and uninteresting respectability, towards the

support of which he was accustomed to contribute. There are some people born into the world, of whom it is perfectly plain that they will never be able to do anything to maintain their places for themselves, and that nevertheless the common enemy will find it an extremely difficult and tedious job to get them out of it. Such people were the two ladies of whom the Clapham establishment consisted, Miss Georgiana and Miss Gwendoline Armitage, who certainly felt (and exhibited) more affection for their cousin Hurst Atlee than that unsympathetic young gentleman was in the habit of showing towards them. The Armitage girls, ever since Hurst Atlee could remember them, had been successfully energetic in their attempts to persuade his mother, and as many of their other relatives as would listen to their plaintive charmings, that they had a moral right to be supported for the rest of their days, by anybody who came under the rather extensive head of "other people." Hurst

Atlee knew that his cousins wanted help of some kind, and by no means grudged the pecuniary assistance which Mrs. Atlee thought fit to bestow upon them; but he was not at all enamoured of the legacy which his mother committed to his charge, when she died just as he was taking his degree at Trinity. Nevertheless, he fulfilled his promise to her by allowing them a hundred a year out of his own scantily-lined pockets, and this though there had been years when his summer holiday had to be omitted altogether, and his circuit rendered a pain and grief to him, in order to provide the necessary cheque for the Clapham cottage. Why and how it was that the sending of the cheque left no feeling of satisfaction in the sender's mind, will be better understood when the reader shall have made acquaintance with the recipients of his bounty.

Hurst Atlee, feeling always as if he was the committee of the persons of a couple of lunatics, was accustomed at least once a quarter to

visit the Clapham cottage in person, and survey with a grim sort of disapproval the results accomplished by his annual contribution towards its expenses. On such occasions, Georgiana and Gwendoline, who had not enjoyed many opportunities of lavishing the wealth of their affection upon such a favourable specimen of the sex of which they stood in such awe, were accustomed to declare very loudly that they had always looked upon him as a brother, and to claim the privilege, not only of certain sisterly caresses, but also of asserting such intimate acquaintance with his inmost life and aspirations as they conceived themselves entitled to enjoy. In particular, they were especially anxious to investigate the direction of any matrimonial views which he might entertain, and not with any less curiosity now that they had long ago given up the shadowy hope that such direction might ultimately point to one of themselves. Of the theories enunciated by Mr. Dunkerry Smith in the pages of the *Periodic* they knew

nothing, and looked at such matters from the simple and intelligible point of view that women were meant to be married, or men would not have been created, and *vice versâ*. Of course they knew all about Nelly Ratcliff, whom they had privately regarded as a designing little idiot, with nothing but a complexion with which to mislead the minds of the great, and they had rejoiced greatly in secret over her expatriation, the personal hope of which mention has been made not then being dead within their souls. Later on, they had openly expressed their pity for the Canadian judge, ostentatiously dropping the balm of their consolation into their cousin's wounds whenever they could get at them, until Hurst Atlee lost his temper with the smart, and literally turned round and swore at his amateur surgeons. Somehow or other, he did not feel afterwards as if he had been swearing at women at all, so entirely accustomed was he to regard his cousins apart from all considerations of sex.

Hurst Atlee went down to Clapham the morning after his thirty-first birthday, not yet having shaken off the depression produced by that anniversary, and being anxious to crown all the *désagréments* of his life into as small a space as possible. In fact, as he had never yet found it possible to envy Gwendoline and Georgiana anything, such visits had generally quite a bracing effect upon his spirits, and sent him away more nearly satisfied with his own career than he was often able to feel.

“There’s dear Hurst,” said Georgiana with effusion, as she saw him standing at the door. She really did feel the same sort of affection for her cousin that a grateful tom-cat entertains for the purveyor of cats’-meat, and tried to rub her head against his when he entered with sentiments not very far removed from such feline instincts.

“Dear old Hurst!” said Gwendoline during the progress of this ceremony, not wishing to be behind her sister in such manifestations.

Gwendoline was the elder of the two, with scanty sandy hair drawn very tightly back from a round bulbous forehead, and a tall gaunt figure, not improved by much mortification of the flesh which the indomitable spirit within had compelled it to undergo, for Gwendoline was *dévoté*. It was not unusual, when any little sisterly altercation of greater dimensions than usual took place between Gwendoline and Georgiana, for the former to threaten her younger sister that she would leave the Clapham cottage for the purer delights of St. Winifred's Home, which had been rendered especially attractive lately by the construction of a bran-new oratory in the back-yard. At such threats Georgiana, who was whiter and more bony even than her sister, and as much inferior to her as Gwendoline was to the average woman in capacity for dealing with the world on her own account, would gurgle and sob with an amount of dampness which an inexperienced observer of her frame would not have given

it the credit of containing, and implore the would-be *religieuse* not to sever the family ties which formed so sweet a bond of union between them. Perhaps the secret of her anxiety to retain her sister's society lay in the fact that she had never herself been able to comprehend the application of the multiplication-table to the ordinary affairs of life. Now Gwendoline laughed to scorn such arithmetical difficulties, and had indeed a fearful and mysterious way of her own of multiplying pounds, shillings, and pence by pence, shillings, and pounds, which almost entitled her to be regarded as a mathematician. At any rate, she was able to deal with the weekly accounts of the butcher and the laundress, and though her powers of compound multiplication had not as yet worked any considerable saving in their quarterly expenditure, Georgiana felt that domestic matters would suffer if left to her own unaided ingenuity.

“You haven't been to see us for ever so

long," said Gwendoline reproachfully, when the sisterly caresses were over; "and you didn't even answer my letter, though I'm sure it was a much nicer one than you deserved."

"Never mind all that, now that we've got him all to ourselves," said the more impulsive and kittenish Georgiana, who was conscious of an immense amount of latent feminine devotion that only wanted a proper masculine object. "You must be made much of, now that you're here; do you hear?"

"Everybody makes much of him, I expect," said Gwendoline, with an air of indifference; "and that's the reason he doesn't care about coming here. You know we haven't got any cousin but you, Hurst."

There was a little poetical exaggeration about this last assertion, but Miss Armitage probably excluded all but able-bodied males from her calculations, and Hurst said nothing to repudiate the honourable distinction thus thrust upon him.

"I've been out of London, of course," he said, feeling that even an only cousin might be allowed his share of autumnal dissipation. "I only came back from Yorkshire ten days ago."

"And we've been longing to see you for weeks," said Georgiana gushingly, "to ask you about Mr. Selfert's marriage—your Mr. Selfert, you know. Fanny Christopher was at school with Miss Morden—the bride, you know—and says she is sweetly pretty. Perhaps you have seen her?"

"I don't think Fanny Christopher knows much about it," said Gwendoline, who did not like to see her own sex obtruding themselves or their opinions in matters which properly pertained to the stronger division of humanity. "You used to think Fanny herself pretty once, and you know she was never much admired by—gentlemen."

Gwendoline spoke with some acerbity, as if she had a right to complain of the erratic nature of the male taste, which rendered it so

difficult for feminine charms to weigh their own value.

"*Is she pretty, Hurst?*" said Georgiana, appealing directly to the standard of masculine humanity.

"I really don't know much about it," said Hurst Atlee, making the effort which it always cost him to speak to his cousins as he would have done to other women; "Selfert thinks so, I have no doubt."

"I suppose she'll have a house in Belgrave Square, or somewhere," said Georgiana vaguely and reverentially. "Mr. Selfert's very rich, isn't he? Where are they going to live, do you know?"

"They've taken a house in Wimpole Street," said Hurst. "I was dining there last night."

"Were you really?" said Gwendoline, thinking how happy must be the lot of a woman able to entertain demigods like Hurst Atlee in a house of her own in Wimpole Street. "How nice for you, to go out to

such dinner-parties as that! I wonder how long it is since I was at a real dinner-party!"

"Why don't you marry too, Hurst?" asked Georgiana, trying to put her arm in his as he stood by the window, in an attitude which seemed to invite such sisterly familiarities. "Only you must find somebody prettier than Mrs. Selfert, of course, and with ever so much money of her own. Then we could come and stay with you, you know, and make you comfortable. I'm sure you must want somebody to look after your socks and things, mustn't he, Gwen?"

Hurst Atlee tried to suppress a shudder at the prospect thus delicately alluded to, and smiled stoically upon his tormentors. What a hideous thing it seemed to him that a man who had already passed his thirty-first birthday should have no better specimens of womankind to take an interest in his socks than these gaunt caricatures which were (metaphorically) tied round his neck for life!

If he had thought that another fifty pounds a year or so would embolden them to seek new matrimonial chances, say in Australia, how gladly would he have made the necessary sacrifice! It even vexed him to think that such fraternal intimacy as that which he was compelled to bestow was probably too precious in their eyes to be bartered for fifty pounds and a renewed antipodean youth.

"I don't think you know what nonsense you talk sometimes," he said brusquely to the younger Miss Armitage. "You said in your note there was something you wanted to speak to me about, Gwendoline, didn't you?"

"Oh, it was only about our Christmas money," said Gwendoline, hesitating a little. "Aunt Robert wants us to go and stay with her for a little, so I thought we might spend a little of it in getting things now, as we shall have no housekeeping for a month or two. She said the last time we were there that she liked to see our bright young faces

about her, so I dare say we shall stay till the new year."

"She liked *what?*" said Hurst Atlee, having really not quite heard the rest of the sentence, and no innate sense of its propriety suggesting it to his mind.

"Our bright young faces," repeated Gwendoline complacently, quite satisfied with the expression, though she could not at the moment remember ever having heard it exactly in that form from Aunt Robert's lips. Nevertheless she thought it a very suitable thing for Aunt Robert, who was nearer ninety than any other round number, to say, and saw no reason why her cousin Hurst should not echo the sentiment. There was no doubt whatever in her mind that she would be a desirable inmate of any house, whatever the sex or age of the householder. Georgiana, who had heard the phrase from her sister's lips before, did her best to look bright and young in unison, but her success was not very great.

The proposed anticipation of "our" Christmas money was eventually agreed to, much to Gwendoline's satisfaction, and Hurst was allowed to extricate himself from the affectionate arms which had entwined themselves in his own. As he walked home, he felt more disgusted with his own life than ever. It did not seem to him that either in its opportunities for usefulness or enjoyment was it very superior to that parasitic existence which Gwendoline and Georgiana would probably lead for another thirty or forty years; and the comparative respect which he was generally able to entertain for himself, after spending an hour or so in their society, did not on this occasion come to his consolation. Parasites have, no doubt, their proper and legitimate place in creation, but Hurst Atlee felt that he himself could imagine a higher kind of enjoyment than that of being crawled over.

CHAPTER II.

It need hardly be said that the clergyman of Lord's-end had by no means really intended to expel Frank from the paternal roof for any such delinquency as that of being seen in the Zoological Gardens with a young lady whose name he declined to mention, and the erring prodigal found no difficulty in slipping into his old quarters, being even able to meet his father's eye at the family breakfast-table without any allusion being made to the enormities which Sophy's vigilance had so lately detected. Frank, who had been a good deal frightened by the bursting of the domestic storm, and the almost coincident shock of his Gravesend adventure, was very quiet and

subdued for a week or two after his perils, and some anxiety was felt in Gotha Street at his failure to revisit the hearth at which he had been made so welcome.

“Why don’t you write to him, Liz?” asked Deacle *père*, coming home from his labours in connection with the red *Echo* carts, and hearing that the imprudent young gentleman, whose iniquities had been so generously forgiven him, had not yet put in an appearance at the shrine where he had been absolved. “Or if he don’t like having his letters sent to him at his ’ome, why don’t you put a line or two in our outside column, with a big L.D., in a line by itself? Of course when he’d read it, he’d see that it didn’t cost you anything, and it’s worth risking fifteenpence over, anyway.”

“‘L.D.’ indeed,” said the fat old woman, with some disdain. “You leave the girl alone, Deacle, and she won’t want any of your L.D.’s. A young swell like that don’t spend ’is time reading the outside columns

of the *Echo*, you may take your solemn oath. Don't mind what he says, Liz, my dear."

Miss Lizzie simply shrugged her shoulders, feeling, no doubt, that she could easily lay out fifteenpence to much better advantage than in the way suggested. Nor did she at first believe that the bird, shy though it might be by nature, had been frightened away entirely from its haunts, though she was naturally a little anxious to see it pecking about the trap again. When, however, the whole of that week passed away, and the greater part of the next, and still nothing was heard of her runaway lover, Lizzie did begin to feel a little uneasy. She was not without her experiences, and knew that Frank had found sufficient terrors in his last escapade to make him much more cautious for the future—cautious enough, indeed, to be willing to sacrifice the soothing consolations of her society, if the temptations of her figure and complexion were at all less attractive baits than she believed them to be. She

was unwilling for a long time to believe that one who had been handled so gently, and had all things made so pleasant for him when he was almost in her power, could be mean and cowardly enough to distrust Gotha Street and all that was within its gates for the future, and snapped savagely at the fat old woman, when she in her turn suggested that some active steps should be taken to recall the truant to the fold that had been made ready for him. But in time the conviction began to force itself upon her mind that such steps would indeed be necessary, and setting her teeth as she thought how dastardly, how passionless must be the nature of a man who could for such empty fears run away and hide his head in the sandy society to which he was more accustomed, she swore in her own mind that he should repent having attempted to play fast and loose with her. Perhaps from some men she might have taken such conduct differently, but she too, like his cousin

Lena, had found Frank Morden "childish," and felt savage to think that this purposeless young idiot, with his clean hands and downy face, should have dared to waste so much of her time before he tried to conceal himself from her retribution. Since his own home difficulties had commenced, he had cautioned her against writing to him at Lord's-end, and up to this time she had abstained from vexing the soul of the clergyman's wife with her tinted envelopes and gorgeous monograms ; but she felt now that the time for such scruples was past, and had no hesitation in disregarding his directions. There was nothing to alarm the shy bird in her first letter ; it was affectionate and even cheerful, with an affectation of proprietary right in her "dearest Frank" which might have been disagreeable to him, but of which he could not very well complain. It troubled him in spirit, however, and he was rash enough to rebuke her in his answer for trespassing against his commands by writing to him at all.

“ You have no idea what annoyance I may be caused by a letter of yours,” he wrote, ignoring altogether the sugar with which the obnoxious missive had been sprinkled. “ I have not been able to come round to Gotha Street, and am sorry to say that I am going down to Devonshire to-morrow until some time after Christmas. When I come back I hope I shall see you again, and that we shall have some more of those awfully jolly little dinners like the last at Gravesend.

“ Yours affectionately,

“ FRANK MORDEN.”

Then was Lizzie's spirit fairly roused, and she turned upon the would-be betrayer like a lioness at bay. He should find that not even in the recesses of Devonshire, if it were true that he was really going to seek refuge there, could he escape from the righteous indignation of the woman he had thought to make a plaything of. As to the “ jolly little dinners ” in perspective of which

he spoke, she knew exactly how much meaning to attach to words like that, and was furious at the idea that such a hypocrite should think her such a fool. Frank Morden received a very short note in reply to his polite despatch, with at least no affectionate manifestations in it of which he could complain.

“I must see you before you go out of town. If I do not hear from you to-morrow morning I shall go to Lord’s-end to get your address.

“L. D.”

Frank, when he read this intimation, felt like a child who has just learned that cats have claws hidden beneath the velvet, but had not pluck enough to defy the scratches with which he was threatened, and wrote a line back saying, that he would meet his fair correspondent at the Waterloo station the next morning.

“I didn’t think you’d have treated me like

this, I can tell you," said Miss Deacle, when she had at last got her recreant admirer face to face with her, after waiting half an hour for him at the trysting-place.

"Like what?" said Frank, with the same brazen look of innocence that had enjoyed such a short-lived success with the natural guardians of Lizzie's reputation.

"Oh, it's no good pretending you don't know what I mean! Here you've never been near me, nor written word, since Saturday fortnight, and father going on at me ever since all the time he's home as if I wasn't fit to sit in the back kitchen. Of course I know what Devonshire means."

"It means the second largest county in England, as far as I know," said Frank, still striving to ward off the conflict which seemed so imminent. "I learnt that in my geography, the same as you did."

"Bosh!" said Lizzie, with quite a masculine intonation, and her voice did not sound as music in Frank's ears. "I suppose you

want to get rid of me—that's about what it comes to."

"I don't want anything of the sort," said Frank, forcing a rather uneasy laugh, "but one can't be always going down to Richmond and Gravesend, you know. Upon my word! I always thought you were a sensible woman till now."

"And what am I to say to father?" said Miss Deacle plaintively. "He's always asking me when it's going to be."

"Going to be?" said Frank inquiringly, not understanding the delicate little euphemism. "When what's going to be?"

"You know what he's thinking about, very well," said Miss Deacle, with something of contempt in her voice. "He means when are you going to marry me, that's all."

Frank could not resist laughing, notwithstanding the gravity of the situation.

"You're not such a fool as to think that, are you? What on earth have you been putting into his head?"

"I haven't put nothing in his head," said Miss Deacle angrily, not liking to see Frank laugh; "and I don't suppose you're going to marry me at all—you're too much of a coward; but of course father does. I never believed you when you said it."

"Said it!" said Frank, utterly astounded by the girl's audacity. "I don't know what you're talking about. If you haven't got anything pleasanter to say than all this rubbish, I don't see the good of standing here any longer. I've put off going out of town a whole day now to please you."

"You'll have to do more than that, some of these days," responded Miss Deacle, with an unamiable expression disfiguring her handsome face. "I suppose you don't remember all you said to me at Gravesend, and in the train coming back?"

"I'm d——d if I do!" said Frank, feeling that the time for bandying soft phrases of affection with the young lady who boasted such an inventive memory was past.

Lizzie got very red and angry, but being unable to talk much without talking loud—a common infirmity of her sex—was restrained by the publicity of their situation from giving much vent to her feelings. She did, however, give Frank to understand that such expressions as that which he had used were not to be addressed to her with impunity, and that he had not heard the last of the Gravesend *contretemps* yet. The threats held out were not very definite, but quite enough to produce a very uncomfortable feeling in his mind as he walked back to Chaffin's, having been absent a very much longer time than he generally found necessary for his lunch.

He had not a friend in the world to whom he could look for advice—or at any rate, advice worth having—in such a matter, and had no idea what assistance the legal constitution of the country might lend to Miss Deacle in the accomplishment of her threatened revenge. There was some dim notion in his mind about the necessity of corrobora-

tive evidence, at any rate in any proceedings which were criminal in their nature; and though he did not think that matters would be as bad as that, yet he was not sure that it would not be as easy to invent one sort of story as another. There was something of tenderness for his late consolatrix left in his mind yet, for his thoughts of Lizzie were still softened by the conviction that all this evil owed its existence to the instigation of the fat old woman.

It is to be regretted that his alleged intended visit to Devonshire, and its postponement for the sake of gratifying Lizzie's natural desire for an interview, were alike fictions of his ingenious brain, devised in order to persuade Miss Deacle that the post-office would no longer be an available medium through which to reach him, and that her poisoned arrows would no longer fly straight to their mark. How he cursed the folly which, in a moment of weakness, had made him deliver himself up into his Lizzie's

hands, tied hand and foot, by allowing her to become acquainted with the Lord's-end address, to say nothing of his connection with "the young lady at Kew!"

Were it not for this inexcusable imprudence, he felt that he might even now be defying Miss Deacle and all her works, including the fat old sack of meat and the distributor of the halfpenny journal. There were other eating-houses in London besides that over which the fair Lizzie presided, and it would not have been unreasonable to have hoped that, as a mere unit of humanity, he might have escaped coming upon her unexpectedly in the Strand on his way to and from the tutorial chambers of Mr. Chaffin. In a few months, too, he hoped, if all went well, to get his commission; and he felt that his luck must be worse than the luck of other fellows, if he could not tide over so short a time without getting into a complication so singularly ill-adapted to vary the monotony of a life under the paternal roof.

Officers in her Majesty's army could, he believed, indulge in such intimacies with impunity ; or, at any rate, could combat such attempts at extortion as that to which he believed he was going to be exposed without the domestic difficulties by which his troubles would, in such a case, inevitably be complicated ; and if he had only anticipated Miss Deacle's intentions, he might certainly have managed to have kept her in a good humour until her wrath had become less tremendous in his eyes.

The postman at Lord's-end was looked for during the next few days with an amount of anxiety and vigilance that considerably abridged the time Frank usually devoted to repose, and he was almost lulled into a false sense of security when a week passed away and Miss Deacle made no sign. "Of course," he said to himself, "she had only been trying to frighten him ;" and he reflected with pride that by his firmness and manly self-possession he had extricated himself with credit from

what might easily, to weaker men, have proved an awkward dilemma.

As he stood before his glass shaving himself on the morning of the eighth day, he was almost able once more to recall with satisfaction the expression of chivalrous respect which had mantled on young Danebury's brow as he took off his hat in acknowledgment of Miss Deacle's charms.

There was a letter on his plate when he descended into the breakfast-room, which, even while the length of the table still separated it from its victim, caused an instantaneous revulsion of feeling, and sent his heart up again with a rush on to that dry shelf half-way down his throat where it had been so often lately making its presence unpleasantly known. The paper was not tinted, and there was no monogram to awake suspicion, but Frank, who felt that Lizzie was more or less powerless without abettors, would have preferred the most gorgeous combination of initials that ever vexed a

mother's careful eye to the ominous-looking missive which lay there to take away the satisfaction of his morning meal. There must be an instinct in the human mind which warns it against lawyers' letters, for Frank, who had never received or seen such a thing before in his life, felt a chill of repulsion as he gazed upon its very outside, which was not at all diminished as he slowly perused its ungrateful contents. He did not at all doubt that Messrs. Houndsell and Goby had been instructed by their client, Miss Elizabeth Deacle, to apply to him with reference to a promise of marriage given by him to that lady, and felt no personal animosity against those gentlemen for carrying out their instructions. The request that he would, if not prepared to fulfil his engagement, state what pecuniary compensation he was willing to offer for its breach, almost touched his sense of humour as he read it, and he wondered grimly whether Miss Elizabeth Deacle's aspirations would be satisfied

by the still remaining balance of the twenty pounds he had taken down to Gravesend. He could manage to make it up to fifteen pounds still, and for a moment half thought seriously of at any rate making the experiment, but the idea that such an offer might be used against him as an admission of his liability came to his aid, and he determined, on the other hand, that he would admit nothing. He would not even admit that he was Frank Morden, Esquire, until he was absolutely compelled to do so, and resolved that Messrs. Houndsell and Goby should not have the barren satisfaction of knowing that their letter had reached its destination. As for obliging them with "the name of your solicitor, who will accept service on your behalf," which was the modest request with which the lawyer's letter concluded, he almost laughed at the modesty of their expectation. It was the business of Houndsell and Goby to catch him, and he certainly was not prepared to do anything which should facilitate

the chase. It might be that such an action could be successfully prosecuted without the name of the defendant's solicitor becoming known to that of the plaintiff, and if so, he felt that he must take the consequences ; but he had a strong idea that delay, at any rate, would be purchased by a little obstinacy in the matter. So he put the letter away in a tin box which had been up to that time principally employed as a storehouse for old valentines, and endeavoured to put the evil thing behind the back of his mind altogether.

The task, however, proved quite impossible. He could not go to Chaffin's in the morning without being painfully reminded of the charms that had proved so traitorous at every one of the refreshment bars of Messrs. Spiers and Pond which he was compelled to pass. The corners of the Strand touched his heart with premonitory uneasiness, and he would have gone round London rather than cross Lincoln's Inn Fields, which had been selected by the enemy as the base of her operations.

Even the hour of lunch, which had been hitherto devoted to such innocent and restorative triflings as those which had led to his acquaintance with Miss Deacle, was now poisoned by reminiscences of the past, and he took to wandering aimlessly about those dreary establishments where the visitor who invests in a glass of sherry is permitted to help himself to biscuit and cheese, uncriticised and unsoothed. Meantime, the letter of Messrs. Houndsell and Goby remained unacknowledged, and was burning a hole in his tin box.

CHAPTER III.

THE professional duties which took up so much of Rothery Selfert's time, though undoubtedly greater than those of the majority of his brother silks, were not so engrossing as to debar him altogether from more liberal pursuits. It has been mentioned that the pages of the *Periodic* had been occasionally enriched by contributions from the pen of the great lawyer, and though his name did not appear at the end of his articles, Mr. Dunkerry Smith took care that the world, or such of the world who took an interest in those matters, should know to whom the readers of the *Periodic* were indebted for so much luminous guidance and exposition.

It was no doubt not strictly professional for a Solicitor-General *in posse* to dabble in the sea of printer's ink at all, but there are some men great enough to defy the criticism of conventionality, and Rothery Selfert rather throve than otherwise on the increased character for versatility for which such rumours got him credit. His admirers declared that here at last was a man who combined the philosophical perception and lucid thought of Austin with the eloquence and practical readiness of the most successful advocate at the bar, and who would surpass the promise of his early university successes and the meridian of his professional career by the maturer fruit of his old age. Perhaps Hurst Atlee was not inclined to take such a favourable view of the successful man's success, and he was indeed on one occasion rebuked by the great *Periodic* editor for the levity with which he spoke to the Q.C.'s triumphs in the realms of literature.

"Stilted?—of course it's stilted," said Mr.

Dunkerry Smith with some asperity. "If you knew as much about the way we get the *Review* to sell as I do, you'd understand more of what the public really like. Now that's just what Selfert understands. They like to be led by a string made fast to their noses, and Selfert always acts as if he knew the ring was in already."

"That's your view," said Atlee. "He always seems to me as if he was trying to bore the hole. When are you going to bring out that long affair of his on the rise and progress of the common *felo de se*? I know he took down the papers with him to finish on his honeymoon—his clerk told me so."

"He's got a paper called 'The Exagogé' in the next number, if that's what you mean," said the editor with some dignity. "I'm sure no man can say Rothery Selfert ever writes a line without being master of his subject. I wish everybody did the same."

"No doubt," said Atlee dryly, "it would save the editor such a lot of trouble. I

suppose you'd think it necessary to get up 'The Exagogé' for yourself, if I was doing it?"

"I don't suppose we either of us know much about it, if the truth was known," said Mr. Smith, who had not all the classical acquirements for which the editor of the *Periodic* was generally given credit, and had to refer to Liddell and Scott before Rothery Selfert's paper was quite intelligible to his perceptions. "No more do the public, of course. I believe they're thirsting for information on the 'Exagogé' business at this very moment."

"Selfert couldn't for his very life write anything calculated to quench thirst, I should fancy," said Atlee. "If you gave him an orange he'd stuff it with sawdust. However, that's your business, not mine. It'll be rather fun to see what he's made out of his honeymoon experiences."

Mr. Dunkerry Smith did not like the idea of any "fun" being got out of the *Periodic*,

and looked annoyed. Hurst Atlee had rather a way of annoying people whose views were not coincident with his own, and having in the present instance attained this laudable end, he appeared satisfied, and left the editor to digest his criticism. Nevertheless, he knew very well that Rothery Selfert's paper, if not exactly calculated to quench thirst, was to be almost a literary event—certainly an event in *Periodic* history.

Rothery Selfert was an eclectic in one of the best senses of the word, and had devoted considerable philosophical and classical attainments, and no inconsiderable time, to an exposition of the moral and statistical aspects of suicide—a subject which he had often declared had been much neglected, no less by philosophers than divines.

The editor of the *Periodic* had professed his willingness to accept his paper—which was indeed almost a pamphlet—without reading it, and a very large part of the pages of the next number were to be devoted to the

attractive subject. Whether or not it was calculated to convince, both editor and author knew very well that it was certain to excite the most active hostility, and the champions both of theology and social science were expected to fly to arms as soon as it should have appeared. Already they were snuffing the battle from afar, and Rothery Selfert himself had looked carefully to the joints of his armour before venturing to take the field. Now that he had no "Juries' Qualification Bill," and no honeymoon, to distract his attention, his mind, which was accustomed to deal with his mere professional duties almost as matters of routine, was given in great measure to the prospect of the coming strife.

Hurst Atlee, who knew a great deal more of the manner in which the writer had treated the subject than he had led Mr. Dunkerry Smith to suppose, having indeed been called in to correct the proofs, assured his patron that he had no reason to be afraid of the responsibility of authorship.

“ You’ll have the bench of bishops about your head, that’s all !” he said when called upon for his opinion.

“ I am not afraid of the bench of bishops any more than I am of the Commissioners of the South Kensington Exhibition,” said Mr. Selfert. “ Yes, I should imagine I’ve got them on the hip once or twice.”

This was said one day at dinner, just before the important number of the *Review* was about to appear, for Hurst Atlee had, as Mr. Selfert had predicted to his wife, been seen a good deal at the house in Wimpole Street, and was now perhaps better qualified to judge of the way in which the barrister’s honeymoon had been spent than on the first occasion of his dining in Mr. Selfert’s company.

Lena had remembered her husband’s warning not to make too much of him, but was by no means disposed to endorse all that had been said on that occasion as to the inexpediency of such treatment. Few men had

more power of making themselves liked and respected by women than Hurst Atlee possessed, and in Lena's society he had always appeared at his best.

She was amused by his cynicism and affectation of superiority over the rest of mankind, which he had carried just far enough to interest her without being offensive ; while the absolute deference he had always shown to the expression of her opinion, even upon matters of which she was conscious that she was almost entirely ignorant, had insensibly prejudiced her strongly in his favour.

She had already begun to listen with respect to utterances which sounded in a stranger's ears as simply dogmatic, and had not failed to notice that her husband, notwithstanding his assumption of contempt behind the speaker's back, did the same. Perhaps no two men ever expressed themselves more strongly for the sake of concealing their real estimation of those around

them than did, on occasions, both Rothery Selfert and Hurst Atlee.

Lena, whose appetite for assimilating the ideas of those with whom she came in contact had not yet been dulled, had managed by this time to pick up quite as much knowledge about "Exagogé" as that possessed by Mr. Dunkerry Smith, and had even ventured on one occasion to ask her husband to let her look at some of the manuscript which lay on the table before him.

To consent was a thing quite foreign to Rothery Selfert's nature, but he had not yet learned the excess of churlishness which refuses without being able to give a reason for doing so, and Lena had been allowed to gratify her curiosity. From her remembrances of the small part she had read, she could quite understand that the bench of bishops were not likely to express their perfect agreement with the views her husband had put forward. She herself would have given a great deal to have known whether

or not they were in accordance with his real opinions, and listened almost with a mental hunger for the most fragmentary remarks which fell from him on such a subject.

"Have you read it all through, Mr. Atlee?" she asked in a sort of whisper, when Hurst Atlee found himself by her side in the drawing-room that evening.

"I believe I've seen it all, at one time or another," said Atlee. "Only of course it will be a different thing to read it through in a connected form. I can never understand anything unless it's in print."

"What is it that he thinks the bishops won't like?" asked Lena, thinking—as she had often thought—that she might perhaps make some use of Hurst Atlee as a sort of guide-book to the unexplored regions of her husband's mind; and having been a little puzzled, besides, by the ponderous levity of Rothery Selfert's allusion to the Commissioners of South Kensington. A man should always be careful how he allows himself

to make a joke in the presence of his wife.

“It’s difficult to explain,” answered Atlee, remembering that he must be more careful in the expression of his opinion before the author’s wife than he had been when appealed to by Mr. Dunkerry Smith. “Some of his arguments are not quite in accordance with what are commonly called Christian views, that’s all.”

“I suppose not even a clergyman is obliged to shut up his mind altogether,” said Lena, as if she was called upon to defend her husband. “And I’ve always heard that the Prayer-book, at any rate, was only composed a few hundred years ago, and has been altered ever so many times already. Any one can see that some of the Thirty-nine Articles are just so expressed as to have as little meaning as possible, in order to prevent people fighting about it.”

“There certainly have been a good many battles fought over most of them,” said

Atlee, who was perhaps not quite so well up in the Thirty-nine Articles as Lena, and had not expected so energetic a criticism of their literary merit. "I dare say the bishops could stand a few more, without feeling that every foundation of our faith was being swept away."

Lena made a little *moue*, expressive of contempt of the whole episcopal bench, past and present, which would have made Florry and the pillar of her orthodoxy shudder, but which certainly affected Hurst Atlee with very different feelings. He laughed a little, but could hardly help wondering how it had come about that all the instinctive reverence which comes so naturally from woman had, in Lena's case, spent itself upon her husband, and began to speculate whether, as a prolonged course of wedded happiness modified the bride's ideas, her sentiments of respect for the dignitaries of the Church would be increased.

"I should like to know what you really

think of the whole paper, when it comes out," said Lena, with almost a note of entreaty in her voice. "You see I shall be a little prejudiced one way, just as the critics will be the other, and I do so like to be able to have a right opinion of my own."

"I've no doubt you'll manage to get one, without my help," said Atlee. "With your intimate acquaintance with the Thirty-nine Articles, and the advantage of being able to get the author himself to explain his meaning, you ought to make a far better critic than I shall."

Lena felt that Hurst Atlee was laughing at her, for the first time since she had known him, and became for a moment intensely indignant. Such a way of repressing her aspirations after the power of intelligent criticism was almost as painful as, and scarcely more superficially courteous than, the calm exclusive dismissal with which her husband waved away her silent but always intelligible entreaties to be taken into his

confidence, and shown the mysterious workings of his soul. She moved slightly away, turning half round with so evident a wish to find some fresh occupation for the moment that Atlee, not usually sensitive in such matters, could not help feeling the check, and voluntarily offered to sit down at the piano, by way of relieving the embarrassment. Lena assented with eagerness, Atlee's music being indeed a treat even in its least favourable manifestations, and always showing to the greatest advantage in the presence of a sympathetic listener—if she were only feminine as well as sympathetic. Neither of them broke the silence, and as they were for the moment alone, she was able to listen without the distraction which would have rendered the fulfilment of such a condition impossible. As he broke away from an extraordinary *tarantelle* with which he had commenced into some wild but perfectly harmonious improvisings of his own, she began to doubt whether she had not almost made

a mistake in venturing to invite the assistance of another man in the interpretation of the phenomena of her husband's mind, and wondered whether in his greater wisdom he had repelled her with intention, to save her from committing so great a blunder. She had not been given to much blushing in the days of her unmarried girlhood, having looked at all things and all people around her with that subdued kind of self-possession which is able to confer most of the delights, if not the reality, of superiority; but her experiences had been enlarged since those days, and the mere thought of having, without intention, done anything which might be thought inadvisable in a wife, was sufficient to send the blood rushing into her face. The silence had not been again disturbed by either of them, when her husband returned, and Hurst Atlee rose from the piano to bid his hostess "good-night" with no trace of the cynical irony with which he had last spoken visible on his features.

"I always become atrociously selfish when I am indulged with a listener like you, Mrs. Selfert," he said, as he took her hand in his.

"Look in at my chambers about eleven to-morrow, will you, Atlee?" said the author of "Exagogé," who was brutally indifferent whether the performer got that feminine appreciation for which his soul craved or not. "You're not busy, I suppose?"

There can surely be hardly anything more offensive to a young barrister who has not yet established himself than the assumption that he is "not busy."

Hurst Atlee, however, never took offence where he thought that it would suit him not to do so, and he seldom thought it well to take offence from Rothery Selfert.

"Not at eleven to-morrow morning?" he said, laughing. "I thought you were to be at the Guildhall?"

The Q.C., who did not like his engagements to be criticised, even by so intimate a satellite as Hurst Atlee, ignored this last

remark with his usual happy magnificence, and got rid of his guest as genially as it lay in his nature to do.

“I’m afraid you’ve had your hands full with him this evening,” he said to his wife, as if conscious that the loss of his own society, even for half an hour, was a deprivation to be apologised for. “I couldn’t get away from those brutes downstairs.”

It may be as well to explain that the “brutes” in question were two of the barrister’s most respected and profitable clients, and especial favourites with Brooking. Rothery Selfert was hardly a grateful man, and had taught himself to believe that in bestowing his professional services the favour was all on one side. Brooking himself, who had charge of the fee-book, and had certainly opportunities of knowing better, was almost converted to the same view.

“His playing is always worth listening to,” said Lena, “but he wasn’t very talkative.”

No doubt she was thinking of the effectual way in which her last attempt at conversation had been dealt with.

“He generally likes to hear the sound of his own voice pretty well,” said Mr. Selfert disparagingly, who was not entirely free from such a propensity himself, and objected to it in other people.

CHAPTER IV.

THE long-expected number of the *Periodic* came out at last, and disappointed nobody by the amount of sensation it created in the literary world ; but not one even of the critics fastened upon it with more eager avidity than Lena, who felt, when at last she held it in her hand, as if she had got possession of a key to unlock some at least of the chambers of her husband's mind. No notion is more prevalent than the idea that the soul of an author must necessarily be legible in his writings, and inasmuch as it is impossible for a man entirely to suppress his own personality in any task which he may undertake, the theory is no doubt not without a certain amount of truth.

It would certainly be a difficult and ungracious task to identify the giants of fiction with all or any of their creations ; but even in fiction, there are few authors who have not set the mark of their own individuality upon some one or more of the puppets they have called into existence, and it is undeniable that there have been thousands who have looked upon the unseen authors of "Esmond" and "David Copperfield" with almost as much affection as if they had been their personal and intimate friends. It was at any rate impossible to look upon such an essay as "Exagagé" as alien to the mind of its author, and Lena drew a deep breath, almost of fear, as she stood hesitating to lift the veil which had always hung between her and her husband's thoughts. It seemed to her that, of all the world, he would the least wish her to listen to or understand his utterances, and she certainly would not have been bold enough to have taken up that number of the *Periodic* in his presence.

She read with interest the first part of the essay, which confined itself to comparing the prevalence of suicide in the different European countries, and showed how its growth had been uniformly coincident with what was commonly called, and looked upon as, the "progress" of nations. It did not touch her heart nor her conscience to learn that Prussia was more addicted than any other great country of the present day to this ambiguous practice, or that it had acquired its most startling and practical popularity in Athens and in Rome under the fostering wing of the purest and most philosophical morality that the uninspired wit of man had ever evolved out of civilisation. All this simply caused her to wonder at her husband's erudition, and to speculate by what sort of educational process a man's mind could get stored with a mass of facts so alien to those which lodge in the crannies of an ordinary woman's brain. It had indeed become more and more of a marvel to her, every day that she tried to

imagine herself living her husband's life, how the masculine mind could find room or time for such trivialities as its relations with the other sex at all, and the process of "assimilation," to which her inexperience had so fondly looked forward, appeared even more difficult and hopeless than it had done at Watermouth Bay. It was not until the thunder began, which was to shake the episcopal bench, that she was really interested, and then she was almost scared by the levity with which dogmas were attacked, and doctrines disputed, which in the Lydcombe Parsonage it had been called damnation to doubt. It was certainly probable that bishops might be disturbed by the assertion that in the whole of the New Testament there was no attempt to prohibit self-destruction, or to interfere with the then fashionable idea, which the Stoic philosophy had for the last two hundred years been impressing upon the intellectual world, that it was on the whole the most graceful and laudable way of

quitting existence that was available. Though Lena was pliant in the matter of the Thirty-nine Articles, she was not entirely prepared to follow her husband through such novelties in the way of moral theory as these; and beyond learning that "Exagagé" was the euphemistic title by which the philosophers in question designated the practical exemplification of their peculiar tenets, she was not conscious of having derived any particular advantage from the intellectual treat to which she had so long been looking forward. She did not think it possible that any man, whose religious convictions were worth anything at all, could have put forth such a manifesto of rebellion against the Church and the creed which she had been accustomed all her life to regard as obscured only by the mysterious secrets of a certain salvation; and she saw, perhaps even more clearly than the professional critics did who came after her, the inadequacy and unfairness of the dogmatic assertion which

professed itself to be combating dogma. All her life she had been looking and hoping for a guide, and it was very bitter to her to find that she could tread with no confidence in the footsteps of the man whom she had chosen as best qualified of all others to stand in such a relation to her. She had always been one of those women who believe that in moral courage, and in capacity for dealing fairly with religious difficulties, they are the inferiors of man; and she had hoped to find some man as able and as willing to direct her in such thorny paths as Florry was satisfied in believing the orthodox vanquisher of her own difficulties, domestic and doctrinal, to be. She felt now, as she had begun to feel for some time past, that she had failed in such a search, nor did it occur to her to doubt the soundness of her own judgment in the present matter. Hurst Atlee had told her, half ironically, that she would be well able to pronounce a verdict upon her husband's production without the aid or guidance of

any masculine opinion; and whether he had meant what he said or not, she was quite satisfied that he had spoken the truth. On such a manifestation of literary display as "Exagogé," she felt that even a woman's mind was qualified to arrive at an authoritative decision of its own—at any rate, such a woman's mind as she herself was conscious of possessing.

She was careful not to utter a word to her husband himself of the painful impression which his pamphlet had produced upon her, and he was gratified at her silence, having a kind of notion that he had already succeeded in imbuing her with some of that delicate tact and reserve which was in his view so great an ornament of the conjugal relation. He did not wish to discuss the subjects of which he had treated over again with anybody—still less with an inexperienced woman, to whom the intricacies of his own mind could only be laboriously explained; and though he did not fail to notice a copy

of the *Periodic* in the house, and knew that he himself had been careful that his own should be inaccessible by profane hands, he showed no curiosity to know if Lena had brought it there, or if her thirst for information had been sufficiently great to induce her to wade through its contents. Until, indeed, the critiques upon it appeared, and the champions of theology arose in their might to crush the audacious foe, he appeared to have dismissed the matter altogether from his mind, and his engagements at Westminster and the Guildhall were again attended to with a punctuality which consoled Brooking for the temporary aberrations that had vexed his soul. Then, however, he made haste to rush into the midst of the fray with a combative energy that was especially characteristic of him, and rejoiced in thinking that the clashing of the spears was heard even on that episcopal bench which he had professed his desire of throwing into dismay. The ecclesiastical disputants who wrote to the *Times*

under the half-concealment of illustrious initials were the especial objects of his wrath, and he was not unwilling that the glories of the struggle should be revealed even to that specimen of the weaker sex on which his own triumphs were to shine with a reflected light.

Lena, however, still carefully abstained from speaking to him of the matter in which he took so great a pride, and it was a little irritating to find that the tact and reserve, so successfully inculcated by him during those monotonous days at Ilfracombe, could be carried a little too far. Such a manifestation of the natural perversity of woman required, in his opinion, correction, no less than the opposite extreme of loquacity had done, and he began to feel almost disgusted at the delicacy of handling that the matrimonial experiment in which he was engaged demanded.

"I wish you would send me some coffee down to the library," he said one evening when they had been dining *tête-à-tête*.

He had gone through the form of following his wife into the drawing-room, and had stood for a few minutes fidgeting in front of the fire, chafing for once under the constraint of a silence which had almost become habitual between them.

“And have you seen that number of the *Critic* that I had in my hand this morning lying about anywhere?”

“There it is,” said Lena, pointing to a side-table, where Mr. Selfert might perhaps have discovered what he wanted for himself, had the independence of his bachelor days been retained. It would not have been unnatural for some wives to have exerted themselves to give to some husbands that for which they sought, and Lena was just the woman to have taken pride in such conjugal service; but Mr. Selfert always seemed one of those men to whom an offer of more assistance than is asked for is almost an insult, and he was allowed to cross the room for the *Critic* himself.

"I thought I left it in the library," said Rothery Selfert in a dissatisfied tone, preparing for his descent.

"Mr. Atlee brought it here this afternoon, to show me something," answered Lena, in a tone that was meant to express as little interest as possible, and achieved its object with some success.

Mr. Selfert would have given a good deal to have been an unseen spectator of Hurst Atlee's visit, feeling sure that his wife had not been so reticent to this comparative stranger as she had learned to show herself in her husband's society.

"Atlee? What was he saying?"

"Nothing—at least nothing that would bear repetition," answered Lena with some hesitation.

In truth, however, her visitor had been more communicative than his wont, but her husband had already taught her to look upon it as almost undignified to serve up a *rechauffé* of her daily trivialities for his delectation,

and no habit grows so soon familiar to the mind as the cultivation of such reticence. It was unreasonable, no doubt, to be dissatisfied with the result of his own educational experiments, but Rothery Selfert was so dissatisfied, without doubt, and there was a cloud on his brow as he gathered his papers together, and left his wife alone. It is so difficult to find a woman who knows exactly when to withhold, and when to bestow, the domestic sympathy which a man of his years expects, when he makes his rash plunge into matrimonial waters, so long and so wisely deferred! There can be little doubt that some such want of adaptability in his royal consort was the cause which compelled the king to count his money in the parlour, while the august partner of his splendours made her simple supper in the attic.

Even that historical princess, however, no doubt occasionally found her solitary bread and honey pall upon the taste, and Lena was not yet sufficiently educated above the rest

of her sex to appreciate the monopoly of dainties to which she was condemned. There were indeed almost tears in her eyes as she sat, pretending to read, in her luxurious solitude, chilled to the very heart by the damp atmosphere of loneliness which she was becoming accustomed to breathe; and the sudden revulsion of feeling which was produced by the servant opening the door, and asking if she could see Mr. Morden, almost brought them down in a hysterical storm. She had only once seen her father since her new life had fairly begun, and welcomed him with an effusion of affection, half laughing and half crying, which would have disconcerted him, had he not always looked disconcerted already at his unsuccessful struggle with this world—and Mr. Selfert's sister.

“My dear,” said Mr. Morden, extricating his head (which looked like a fragment of shingly sea-beach, with very little seaweed) from his daughter's sleeves, “I hope you don't mind my coming in so late?”

Lena began to laugh, tenderly enough, as she always had done at her father's meekness.

"You're just as silly an old man as ever!" she said, pushing him away from her, and trying to re-arrange the ruin the sea-beach had effected in her toilet. "Why have you never been to see me before, sir? Don't you know that people expect you to come and call on a lady after you've dined with her?"

Mr. Morden, who remembered that Rothery Selfert had once been his host, but had never realised before that his daughter had any connection with the entertainment he had received on that occasion, shook his head with a puzzled sort of humility, and looked nervously round for his magnificent son-and-brother-in-law.

"Yes, he's in," said Lena, answering her father's unspoken question, "but I don't suppose he'll come out of the library unless you've asked for him. Really, I think he'd much better not."

Mr. Morden, if he had dared to follow his paternal instincts, would have mildly re-proved his daughter for her want of conjugal respect, but a look of half seriousness in her eyes, and the consciousness that he was not responsible for her indiscretions now, warned him not to venture.

"I don't want to disturb him, of course, at this time of night. But I dined in town to-day by myself, instead of going back to Kew, and so I thought—"

The exertion of completing any sentence, which was not the first that had occurred to him to utter, was quite too much for Mr. Morden, but Lena, who was leaning over his chair, patted him gently on the head, which was the accustomed signal between them for a change in the subject of conversation, and he was relieved from the necessity.

"Now you must be very quiet and good," said Lena encouragingly, "and you may tell me all about the people I haven't seen for an

age—there are dozens of them. I don't seem to have got any relations left."

"Mrs. Morden, my dear?" hinted her father with a nervous little cough, but a gentle touch on the head warned him not to come to Mrs. Morden till the others were exhausted, at any rate. Nevertheless, they did not readily occur to his mind—certainly not in dozens. "I don't know that there's much to tell you about them, my dear," he said, somewhat perplexed. "There's your uncle at Lord's-end—I dined there last Sunday."

Mr. Morden spoke of his past festivity as if he had been a boy at the Blue-coat School, asked to spend a Sunday out once a quarter or so.

"Wouldn't you like to come and dine quietly with me the next Sunday you can get away?" said his daughter encouragingly. "It would be better than having to go all the way to Lord's-end, you know, and perhaps we shall be all by ourselves—Mr. Selfert often goes away after church."

“It’s the only day I have to spend down at Kew, you see, my dear,” said Mr. Morden in a desponding tone; “and Mrs. Morden doesn’t always like being left alone.”

This was quite true, as Mrs. Selfert’s sister liked to have room and time for her criticisms on her husband’s sins of commission and omission, and found that Sunday afternoon was an eminently suitable occasion for holding her weekly tribunal. Mr. Morden fell into a gentle reverie as he thought how a whole fortnight would have swelled the calendar before the next sittings.

“How’s Frank getting on?” asked his daughter, suddenly awakening him, “and Sophy?”

Sophy’s welfare was not, however, a matter of very great interest to the enquirer, who had never properly appreciated an effort which the disciple of the Anglican place of worship in Taunton Street had made to convert her cousin. Had she known the latter’s views on the inviolability of the Thirty-nine

Articles, she would certainly never have had courage to attempt the straightening of so crooked a post.

Mr. Morden suddenly remembered that he had something to say which would interest his daughter at last, recollecting very well the evening when she had declared that her cousin Frank's childish importunity was even worse than Mrs. Morden.

"Sophy's very well, my dear, I believe, but your uncle's not at all comfortable about Frank. They're afraid at Lord's-end that he's getting into some silly scrape or other, and he looks miserable."

"I think he ought to come and see me," said Lena with dignity, as if Frank's troubles were the natural penalty of his neglect. "Tell him that if he does I will ask him to dinner."

"Perhaps it might be just a little—painful—to him, 'my dear,'" Mr. Morden hinted timidly, appearing to have a more vivid recollection of Frank's 'childish' behaviour on

previous occasions than his daughter had preserved.

"Painful?—how *can* you talk such nonsense!" said Lena, again patting her father's head, as if in disrespectful condemnation of its silliness. "You don't suppose he's going to remember what he did when he was a baby all his life?"

"I thought it was just possible, my dear," said Mr. Morden meekly. "You know he's only a boy still."

"Then he ought to be ashamed of himself!" observed Mrs. Selfert with dignified asperity. "Why, I'm married now." There are, no doubt, cases within human experience where a misplaced attachment has not been cured by the marriage of the beloved object to another, but Mr. Morden was afraid of pointing out that this simple and inexpensive remedy was sometimes not entirely successful.

"He'll be all right when he sees me," continued Lena with confidence. "I'm sure I can put all that sentimental nonsense out of

his head. Tell him he must come and see me at once, do you hear? What's he been doing?"

Mr. Morden told his daughter all about the monogrammatic and scented correspondence which had filled the maternal breast with apprehension, not concealing the clandestine iniquities of the Sunday at the "Zoo," and the half-admissions made by the culprit that there was a young lady in the matter who ought to have been kept out of it, and Mrs. Selfert listened with all a matron's dignity to these revelations of evil. Nevertheless, she thought it more essential than ever for Frank's welfare that he should come to the house in Wimpole Street, and Mr. Morden promised to convey such an intimation to him at the earliest opportunity.

"I think he would rather not see Mr. Selfert, do you know?" said Mr. Morden, judging from Heaven knows what bygone and distant experiences of his own, when his domestic responsibility and his Treasury

standing were alike less important; but Lena declared that she would not allow her cousin to be influenced by any such infantile considerations. Perhaps Mr. Morden was judging his nephew by his own present feelings, for he certainly felt that to have seen the eminent barrister about whose relationship to himself he always felt much perplexed would have marred the pleasure of what he considered to have been an eminently successful and paternal visit.

CHAPTER V.

FRANK MORDEN had been able to lock away the ominous missive of Messrs. Houndsell and Goby in his tin box, and he had tried to forget all about the suggestion as to pecuniary compensation with which it concluded, but he had not succeeded in putting away the apprehension from his mind that Miss Deacle's revenge would not be satisfied until she had made some further use of the knowledge of the locality in which her victim was to be found, with which he had in a moment of madness supplied her. He did not know whether her next attack would be made again through the medium of the post-office, or if some still more objectionable means of

approach would be resorted to, and led a more uneasy life than ever, being now filled with alarm not only at the postman's periodical visits, but at every sound of the bell or knocker which suggested the possibility of an offensive visitor. His father, who still treated him with the stern and ominous reserve that his iniquities merited, took no notice of the cloud that was hardly ever absent from his brow, but the softer heart of the clergyman's wife was quicker to detect the uneasiness of his manner.

"My dear boy," she said to him one evening when Mr. Morden had gone to his study, "I am afraid you are in dreadful trouble about something."

Frank tried to smile, and shook his head with an attempt at cheerfulness.

"I've got examination on the brain, I suppose," he said.

"I wish you'd tell your father all about it, whatever it is," said Mrs. Morden, who knew that Frank's despondency was not in any

way connected with his occupation at Mr. Chaffin's chambers. "Only if it's about money——"

Sophy, who was always a little sore about the sums her brother was allowed to squander, while she had so much difficulty in scraping together the few pence which the week-day services at Taunton Street rendered necessary, shut down the piano with unnecessary violence and walked out of the room.

"I don't owe five pounds in the world," answered Frank with something very like sulkiness.

"Then of course I can't guess what it is," said his mother; "but it's dreadful to see you and your father living together like this. He wouldn't be half so stern if he thought you trusted him."

Frank's only reply to this was a short grunt, intended to express utter scorn of the suggested confidence, but the very fact of his finding it necessary to grunt was an admission that there was something that ought to

be confided, and the mother's heart was heavy within her.

Just at that moment there came an ill-sounding knock at the front door, and Frank's soul was up in his throat in a moment. Mrs. Morden saw the start, and made more sure than ever, notwithstanding his denial, that debt of some sort was at the bottom of her son's uneasiness. Then there followed shuffling in the passage, while the servant girl endeavoured, without success, to classify the visitor under some one of the heads with which she was acquainted, during all which time Frank was trying to induce his soul to slip back into its normal resting-place. His powers of persuasion were still showing their utter incompetency for the task, when the girl entered, and suggested that it would be well if Mr. Frank were to step into the passage for a minute.

Although she had served in households less immaculate than that of the Lord's-end clergyman, she had not yet detected the

nature of the stranger, or she would not tamely have consented to become the tool of the oppressor.

Of course Frank had to go out, evading his mother's eye as he did so, and it was all over in a minute.

"Mr. Francis Morden, I believe?" said the dirty little attorney's clerk, pressing upon him a little slip of blue paper as he did so. "Houndsell and Goby haven't the pleasure of knowing who acts for you, Mr. Morden, or they wouldn't have bothered you with this. Of course it will be different when you've entered an appearance."

Frank, who had not the slightest idea how to set about entering an appearance, felt a strong impulse on the moment to take the dirty little clerk into his confidence, but remembered in time that he was already enlisted on the other side, and that it would become incumbent on him to retain dirty little clerks of his own.

He walked back into the presence of his

mother with a feeling of dull despair creeping over him, and the little slip of blue paper folded away in his waistcoat pocket.

"I think I might as well go out for a pipe," he said as calmly as possible; and Mrs. Morden, although with a sinking heart, forbore from pressing him further to unfold his griefs. The tin box, which had already proved so inefficacious, was not again resorted to, and the slip of blue paper remained for the night in his waistcoat pocket.

It was the day after this consummation of his miseries that Frank got his cousin Lena's message, accusing him of neglect in not having been to see her in her new home, and though there was something in his mind of that feeling of unwillingness to face his triumphant rival which Lena had declared was not to be tolerated, yet, in his present abomination of desolation, he could not afford to turn his back upon any one who might be prepared to sympathise with his woe.

It cannot be said that his imprudent ad-

ventures in Miss Deacle's society had been entirely unsuccessful in enabling him to get over his boyish infatuation for his cousin, and though he still felt a tender regret for what he had lost, and still believed, with some truth, that he would have been in all respects a better man if she had listened to his pleading, yet his more immediate troubles so overshadowed the past that he was willing to welcome her cousinly affection without remembering that he had asked for more.

"I think you might have come to see me before, Frank," said his cousin, when he was shown into the drawing-room in Wimpole Street.

She was quite alone, and the educational advantages to which she had lately been subjected had certainly not yet had time to impair the soft perfection of her cheek; yet Frank was conscious that something of the indefinable charm in her manner, which had so enchained his senses a few months back, had disappeared, and did not stop to ask

himself whether the altered effect might not be due to a change in his own feelings and perceptions.

He stammered out some kind of excuse for his neglect, explaining the extensive nature of the demands on his time which were made by Mr. Chaffin, but Lena was not likely to forget that his ardour in the acquisition of learning had not prevented him from coming down to Kew to see her as often as he fancied she would welcome him, and he knew that she saw through his flimsy veil of apology.

"You silly boy," she said, with the delightful superiority of a matron, "you don't suppose I believe all that rubbish? I mean you to tell me all you've been doing before you go away, so you may as well make up your mind to speak the truth."

Frank smiled faintly, and shook his head, feeling that there were secrets in the life of such a man as himself which it would be

difficult to confide to the ears of the woman he had loved.

"Of course I wasn't anxious to come and see you here," he said, in tones which were meant to awake compassion.

Lena, however, was firm to her resolution about expelling all ideas of romance from his youthful mind, and did not at all doubt her own powers of doing so.

"You weren't anxious, I knew; but now you see I've sent for you."

"Of course I can't forget all about the past as quickly as you can. It's different with a woman."

"Never mind about the past," said Lena, who did not feel inclined to discuss the essential characteristics of the sexes with her cousin. "I want to know what you're doing now, and I've heard all sorts of dreadful stories about you."

Frank's brow flushed with a consciousness of his own moral turpitude, and he began to wonder how much of the truth could possibly

have come to his cousin's ears. The secret of the communications which Messrs. Houndsell and Goby had opened with him had been kept hidden away in the depths of his own soul—and of his tin box—but it was just possible that the enemy had not been so reticent, and it struck him as not improbable that Miss Deacle might have attempted to attack him from this side also.

“How can I tell what you've heard?” he said almost sullenly, but without any more inclination to allude to the sorrows of the past. “People will say anything they can get listened to.”

“There haven't been any ‘people’ to say anything,” said Lena; “but I know very well you're in some sort of trouble. Surely you might tell me if there's anything to bother you?”

Frank had never been able to maintain the sternness of his resolution when his cousin chose to exercise her powers of persuasion, and was compelled to admit that

there was some foundation for her conjecture.

"And it's about a woman, isn't it?" asked Lena, pushing him very hard.

"Yes," said he doggedly, "it is, more or less. I don't know why you should bother yourself about it."

"If you don't know, I do," said Lena, who did in reality feel as if she was in some measure responsible for any folly into which the bitterness of his disappointment might have driven him. "I don't know why you should treat me like this."

The cup of Frank's emotion overflowed at this last pathetic appeal, and he confided to his cousin's sympathetic ears the whole history of his perplexities, and of the vengeance threatened by Miss Deacle's indignation.

"She hasn't a leg to stand upon, really, you know," he explained, fearing that Lena might not understand how entirely blameless he had been throughout. "Only she fancies she's got rather a hold on me; of course I

did one or two silly things, and I know she's ready to swear anything." The Gravesend adventure was mentally included by him among the "silly things" to which he confessed, but he felt that it would be difficult to explain to his cousin how absolutely clear was his conscience with regard to his conduct on that occasion, and satisfied himself and her by a general assurance that he had been in all that had happened more sinned against than sinning. "Of course all she wants is money," he concluded.

Lena had no idea how much money Miss Deacle might want, but did her best to comfort the unfortunate victim of that young lady's fascinations by assurances that she would see him safely through his trouble.

"There's nothing like showing people of that sort that you're not afraid of them," she observed sagely. "I dare say you'll have to pay her something, but that can easily be managed."

Frank shook his head gloomily, thinking

how little management was within his own power in such a matter, and Lena did not then tell him that she would have no hesitation in applying to her husband for such a purpose, thinking the offer had better come from Mr. Selfert himself.

“I think you’d better tell my husband all about it,” she said after a little thought.

It had never occurred to Frank that any use could be made, in the present difficulty, of any of the advantages connected with his cousin’s accursed marriage, and he felt that, if it became the indirect means of rescuing him from his present difficulties, it would not be quite so accursed as it had seemed at first sight. He had indeed quite forgotten that Rothery Selfert was a lawyer, and though not possessed himself of such clerks as Messrs. Houndsell and Goby employed to do their dirty work, could no doubt put him in the right way of retaining such defenders.

“I think that will be best,” he answered

after a pause, with his face a little averted, for he remembered his interview in the railway carriage with Rothery Selfert, on the evening when he had made his journey back to town without his hat, and did not quite like the idea of coming to him as a suppliant for his assistance.

Before he left Wimpole Street, however, it was arranged that Mr. Selfert should be asked by his wife to throw the ægis of his powerful protection between Frank and his enemies in Lincoln's Inn Fields, and the victim of Miss Deacle's perfidy felt more at ease as he made his way back to the solitudes of Lord's-end than he had done since Messrs. Houndsell and Goby had opened their first parallel against his position. Surely an embryo Solicitor-General must be more than a match for Messrs. Houndsell and Goby!

CHAPTER VI.

LENA was conscious that she did not yet understand her husband much better than she had done when he had come, like a Jupiter descending at the feet of a daughter of earth, to rescue her from the impending desolation of Lord's-end. Nevertheless, she did not in the least apprehend that she would find any difficulty in enlisting his sympathies on behalf of her cousin Frank, and had no hesitation about opening the subject to him next morning at breakfast. She knew that he was liberal with his money, and remembering what her father had told her of his offer to assist him with cheques of unknown amount, and of the fabulous

balance which Brooking caused to be kept at his bankers', she had little doubt that if Frank could be got out of his difficulties by pecuniary assistance, that assistance would easily be forthcoming. Rothery Selfert was fond of shutting up his thoughts from his fellow-creatures, but she did not anticipate that he would shut up his pocket.

She was casting about in her mind for words in which to ask her husband's assistance in her beneficent designs, when he himself anticipated her by touching on the very subject.

"Hadn't you some of your relations here yesterday afternoon?" he said as they were sitting at breakfast.

"Yes," she answered without hesitation, "at least, my cousin, Frank Morden, was here. Perhaps you remember seeing him down at Kew? You must remember a boy of about twenty?"

Rothery Selfert remembered him very well, having preserved a lively recollection of having been told by the boy of about twenty,

in the railway carriage going up to London, that his language was "impertinent."

"I don't know what his age may be," he replied stiffly, "but I remember him very well. He was good enough to interest himself on your behalf, and to express himself rather strongly on the matter to me. I suppose he was an aspirant for your hand, was he not?"

Lena, who had not forgotten how to blush, as so many women do after they are married, turned crimson with vexation.

"That is all over and forgotten long ago," she said hastily. "I believe he has forgotten it himself, and I am sure I had. He was almost a school-boy then, you know."

"I don't remember him as a school-boy at all," said Mr. Selfert. "On the contrary, I thought him much inclined to put himself forward, and most presumptuous with regard to his relations with you. I cannot say that I should be inclined to welcome him as a frequent visitor here."

"I don't suppose he has the slightest intention of becoming a 'frequent visitor,'" said Lena; "but you can hardly expect me to forbid him the house, as we have been almost like brother and sister all our lives."

She felt that her husband was hardly in the spirit in which he would be most favourably disposed to consider her application on Frank's behalf, but had no intention, all the same, of giving up her design.

"I wish you'd see him to-morrow, when he comes."

"Who?—I?" said Mr. Selfert, rather taken aback by the proposal, and remembering the unsatisfactory nature of his last interview with the young gentleman in question. "I really don't see what would be gained by that."

"He wants to ask your advice," said Lena "and I told him I was sure you would not mind helping him."

"I don't understand you at all," said her

husband. "Why should he come for advice to me?"

The idea in Lena's mind, that Frank's embarrassments were due to his folly, and that his folly had been aggravated by his disappointment, and that she and her husband were in some measure responsible for the disappointment, involved too complicated a theory of causation to be explained just then.

"He has got himself into dreadful trouble at home—there is a horrible woman who wants to get money out of him, and has got some lawyers to threaten him with an action."

Mr. Selfert did not like being entrapped into a professional consultation, even by his wife, and was certainly not disposed to confer the benefits of his experience on such an undeserving object as that for which it was asked.

"Surely it was unnecessary, and rather unusual, for him to come to you with such a story as that!"

“ I don’t see that at all,” said Lena. “ He has no more idea what he ought to do about it than a baby, and his father would turn him out of his house if he had a suspicion of such a thing. I wish you would do something to help him.”

Rothery Selfert did not quite know what answer to make, considering that his wife was stepping beyond her own province, not only in interesting herself in her cousin’s disreputable difficulties, but also in attempting to dictate to himself what his own conduct should be in the matter.

“ I do not wish to speak hastily,” he said slowly—so slowly that his affectation of a temperate tone became a positive insult—“ but I think you are making a great mistake. It is quite unnecessary for you to interfere in such matters, and had your cousin been possessed of the proper perception of a gentleman, he would not have obtruded them on you. I do not think the subject will bear any more discussion.”

“ I am sure you don't understand what I mean,” said Lena, with an impotent feeling of despair at being unable to struggle against her husband's impenetrable persistence in viewing the subject from his own point of view. “ Nothing could have been more natural than that he should have come to me.”

“ I assure you that you must allow me to judge for you in such a matter,” said Rothery Selfert, with the same irritating calmness. “ No doubt you are quite honest in saying that you differ from me, but there really cannot be two unprejudiced opinions on the matter.”

There is certainly nothing more offensive than this kind of argument, if it can be called argument, to stigmatise your opponent's views as opposed to the rational intelligence of the whole world, who have really nothing whatever to do with the matter.

Lena felt that her husband was insulting her, and even if she had been less afraid of

him, was not a woman who would enter into a war of words with such an adversary. She sat quite still and silent, as had been her wont from her childhood when obliged to listen to reproof, and her husband of course failed to understand the spirit in which she refrained from answering him. Many men would have mistaken her demeanour for that of sullenness, and would have been roused by the supposition to still wordier rebukes, but Rothery Selfert had no conception of the possibility of such a sentiment existing in his wife's mind, and quietly chipped the shell of another egg, in the full belief that her silence resulted from the conviction of a rational submission to his own will. Lena knew that he so regarded it, but had not the heart to attempt to dispel the idea, though she would almost have preferred that he should have made the other and more common mistake. Which of the two errors was least likely to conduce to their domestic happiness, she did not attempt to decide.

No more passed between them at that time on the subject, and the breakfast was finished peaceably. Then Rothery Selfert got up and walked out of the room, with the frown still on his brow, as if he disliked such necessities for establishing his marital authority as had arisen; but he considered that he had repressed his wife's imprudence well, on the whole, and did not think that any further occasion would arise for repeating the dose. It was this expression in his face which galled Lena's feelings so intensely, and she felt that she would almost have preferred his turning round and swearing at her, to the insufferable expression of superiority which he had assumed.

When he had got outside the house she began to realise how rudely she had been rebuffed, and how completely she had failed in carrying out the promise which she had made to her cousin with such a light heart the day before. Already, as she came to know her husband more intimately, she had

been awakened from many of the girlish delusions which she had cherished as to his perfections, but she had not dreamed that he would be so headstrong, so foolish, as to oppose her in such a thing as that which she had asked of him. Even if he was not willing to assist any or all of her relations, for the simple reason that they were hers, she thought, as has been said above, that her cousin Frank had a double claim upon Rothery Selfert's consideration, and she had believed that her husband would have been generous enough to have acknowledged that claim. She had been too proud to remind him of this, but it had been none the less present to her own mind, and to find that such generosity was wanting in his nature did not increase the stock of conjugal respect which had been so fast diminishing lately. As to the miserable pretence that her cousin had been guilty of disrespect to her in bringing such troubles under her notice at all, she knew very well how entirely it was destitute

of foundation, and was not at all willing that, in such matters, her own powers of forming an opinion should be merged in her husband's. As to the illiberality and obstinacy which could insist upon thrusting such an unrighteous judgment down her throat, she could not yet trust herself to think of them quietly.

She was quite resolved, however, that she would not allow herself to be defeated in her plans for assisting her unfortunate cousin if she could help it; and though no more submissive wife, had she been managed properly, could ever have gladdened the autocratic heart of man, yet she had already made up her mind that, in this instance, she would not bend to the spirit of her husband's will. He had said that interference by her in her cousin's affairs was unnecessary, and had condemned as strongly as possible the object for which it had been made, but he had not absolutely forbidden her to interfere; and though she would not have ventured to

transgress any direct command which he had laid upon her, she did not feel called upon, in her present state of mind, to yield more than such strict obedience to the letter of his wishes. Of course she could not obtain any money, except in insignificant amounts, without his co-operation, but it had already crossed her mind that she might be able to get Frank help, which might be quite as valuable, from other sources. She remembered that Hurst Atlee was also a lawyer, however insignificant his reputation might be in comparison with that of an eminent Q.C., and she felt sure that he, at any rate, would not refuse to help her to the best of his ability. Of course she knew that her husband would not be pleased by her calling in such assistance, and she certainly would not condescend to hide from him that she had done so, but then matters could hardly be worse between them than they were already, and she felt that it was almost due to her own self-respect to show him that she was not

disposed to surrender her own will to his as blindly as he appeared to consider she was bound to do. Besides, she had given her word to her cousin Frank, and was not inclined to confess her own incapability without a struggle. So she sat down before the shock of the disappointment and indignation caused by her husband's language had passed away, and wrote a short note to Hurst Atlee, asking him to call upon her that afternoon. As she had grown accustomed to seeing Mr. Selfert make use of his late "devil" whenever he had occasion, without any apparent delicacy or compunction, it hardly struck her that she was doing anything unusual in following so excellent an example.

Hurst Atlee, when he received this note amid the desolation of Vernon Buildings, knew very well that the request which Mrs. Selfert had to make of him was at any rate something entirely out of her husband's knowledge; as he had seen Rothery Selfert within the last half-hour, and their conversa-

tion had not strayed further than the limits of a very bitter article on the demerits of "Exagogé" in that week's *Cynic*, which was supposed to come from the pen of Arry Lear. Mr. Lear, whose proper name was Arundel, but who was commonly known by the more affectionate diminutive, had formerly been on the same circuit as Rothery Selfert, and when he quitted his profession in disgust for the lighter paths of journalism, had carried with him the still smouldering ashes of a feud between himself and his more successful rival, which the latter had certainly never made any effort to extinguish. As Mr. Lear was not generally found on the same side as the bench of bishops, the malicious inconsistency with which Rothery Selfert's *brochure* had been attacked was all the more galling.

"Fancy such a brute as Lear talking about Divine purpose!" said the author in wrath, referring to an objection which had been taken by the critic to his own theory of an

alleged right in man to exercise some control over his destiny.

Atlee admitted that, in this instance, Mr. Lear had stepped a little out of his peculiar province to gratify his personal pique, but reminded the object of his attack that the views of the *Cynic* on "Divine Purpose" were not generally accepted as trustworthy.

"It's almost a materialistic organ, you know," he said consolingly. "How any man can degrade himself by advocating views in which he is well known not to have any conscientious belief, is more than I can understand," said Mr. Selfert, with an attempt to look as if his armour was proof against the barbed arrows employed by Mr. Arry Lear.

Then he had gone into the privacy of his own chambers to bathe his wounds, but he had not said anything, as he certainly would have done had it been within his knowledge, of his wife's desire that Hurst Atlee should call in Wimpole Street that afternoon.

The messenger who had brought the note

had gone without waiting for an answer, and Atlee felt rather amused at the thorough confidence with which Mrs. Selfert relied upon his obedience to the expression of her wish. Women are quick to recognise the men whom they can absolutely command for whatever service they may require, without troubling themselves much about the reason, and Lena knew instinctively that Hurst Atlee was not likely to allow any obstacles to stand in the way of his coming at her bidding.

“I hope it was not inconvenient for you to come here this afternoon,” she said when her note had achieved the desired result.

“Not at all,” replied Atlee, who knew very well that by absenting himself from his chambers at that particular time he was running the risk of offending one of the few clients who had yet found their way there. “Of course I shall always be delighted to be of any use to you.”

“You can be of great use to me now, if

you don't mind the trouble," said Lena, who felt a little embarrassed about explaining how it was that she was compelled to have resort to a comparative stranger, instead of the husband whose experience would more naturally have been at her service. Then she explained to him, as fully as she knew them, the difficulties of the position in which her cousin had been injudicious enough to place himself, and the special anxiety she felt that his way out of them should be made as easy to him as possible.

"Isn't it unfortunate?" she concluded.

"Very," said Atlee, who could not help wondering how it had come about that he was selected as Mrs. Selfert's confidant in this matter, and why her cousin could not have gone straight to his lawyer in the regular way.

"I should tell you," said Lena, hesitating a good deal as she spoke, "that my cousin has unfortunately been foolish enough to offend Mr. Selfert, and is besides anxious

that nothing of all this should come to his knowledge, if possible. If Mrs. Morden—Mr. Selfert's sister, I mean—heard of it, it would almost certainly come to the ears of his father and mother, which is just what he wants to avoid."

The struggle which she had to undergo with her conscience, before she could make up her mind to this embellishment of the strict truth, was severe, but she told herself that it was absolutely necessary, unless she meant to give up her design of helping Frank altogether. Atlee saw that there was something more behind, but he saw also that he was not meant to suspect its existence.

"Yes, yes," he said, "I understand all that, of course. Perhaps the best thing will be for me to see Mr. Morden—your cousin—alone. Do you think he could manage to call at my chambers?"

"If you would be so good," replied Lena, gratefully, yet feeling a little disappointed at finding that she was not personally to be

conferred with as to the measures which were to be taken for Frank's preservation. Nevertheless she was not disappointed at the spirit in which Hurst Atlee appeared ready to take the matter up, and felt that she could trust him to do his best in order to circumvent the machinations of Miss Deacle and her advisers. "I will tell him to come to you, if I may—perhaps to-morrow morning?"

It was settled that Frank should go to Vernon Buildings on the following day, and Atlee held out strong hopes that they would be able, when he had got hold of all the real facts of the case, to baffle Messrs. Houndsell and Goby.

"Half these things are regular 'plants,' my dear Mrs. Selfert," he said, "and I have very little doubt that if Mr. Morden has not been foolish enough to put his name to paper we shall manage to pull through."

Atlee was, however, by no means so confident in his own mind, and thought it more than probable that Miss Deacle had taken

care that her victim should compromise himself unmistakably before letting him slip through her fingers. Of course the matter could be quietly and amicably settled, if money was forthcoming, but he understood Mrs. Selfert to say that there was some hitch about this part of the business.

"Tell me what money is required," she said, "and I will see whether it can be arranged."

When she said this, it was more evident than ever to Atlee's mind that Mr. Selfert's wife had some good reason for not counting upon her husband's aid in this matter.

Frank Morden, having been duly communicated with by post, made his appearance at Vernon Buildings next morning at the time Atlee had named, feeling as shame-faced as a man usually does when receiving from the hands of a woman a benefit which he cannot dispense with, and yet is conscious that he does not deserve. Nevertheless, as his story had been told once already, its

narration for the second time was a less difficult task, and he got fluent enough over his own wrongs as he went on.

“And you’ve never written her a line in your life?” asked Atlee.

“I won’t quite say that,” said Frank. “There may have been one or two notes telling her where to meet me next day, and so on. Nothing more than that, upon my word.”

“Those won’t go for much, then,” said the barrister. “Has she had any money out of you?”

“Well, she’s had money’s worth, you know—a dress or two, and a ring—but not money. I give you my honour I should have been afraid of insulting her by offering it!”

“I don’t like rings,” said Atlee; “they’re about the worst thing you can give a woman. However, we must make the best of it—I don’t see that she’s had anything to complain of, so far. She’s none the worse for

having knocked about with you at Richmond and those places, I suppose?"

Atlee watched Frank's face very closely as he put this last question, but the young man was apparently quite unconscious of any reason for feeling disconcerted.

"Not a bit!" he said indignantly.

"Because, you know," said the barrister half-apologetically, "that sort of thing goes such a long way with a jury."

Even however for such luxuries as dinners at Richmond and Gravesend, Hurst Atlee knew that juries are wont to make men pay tolerably dear, if they can find any peg upon which to hang an excuse for doing so.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," he said. "You leave the writ with me, and I'll see Houndsell and Goby about it myself. I can easily find out if they really mean fighting, and whether it'll be worth your while to offer them anything down to give up the whole thing."

Frank smiled a sickly sort of smile,

thinking how delightful would be his position if told that it would be worth his while to offer Messrs. Houndsell and Goby any sum at all, at any rate in excess of the twenty pounds which he held in readiness for such emergencies. He had of course extracted the missive of those gentlemen from its resting-place in the tin box, where it had left quite a void among the treasures of his youth, and confided it, together with the writ which had been served upon him by the dirty clerk, to Hurst Atlee's keeping. As he did so, he remembered the dirty clerk's enigmatical remark about entering an appearance, and thought it well to repeat the friendly hint for his champion's instruction.

"Oh, that's all right," said the barrister, smiling at the victim's ignorance of the method by which Messrs. Houndsell and Goby sought to reduce their foes.

Frank felt that he ought to express some gratitude for the energy Hurst Atlee was prepared to display in his behalf, but being

ignorant of the exact nature of the claim his cousin Lena had upon the barrister's devotion, made rather a poor show of his thankfulness. At any rate he went away from Vernon Buildings much relieved in spirit, and felt that he had at last engaged a defender fit and able to cope with the dirty clerk whom Miss Deacle had retained to do her work.

CHAPTER VII.

GREAT as are the advantages offered by the proper kind of matrimony to a girl in the position in which Lena Morden had found herself, even that laudable object of feminine aspiration has drawbacks of its own. Chief among such drawbacks is no doubt the almost absolute severance which is thereby made between the successful aspirant and the more trivial and pleasant associations of her youth ; and the days Lena had spent in the Lydcombe parsonage, to say nothing of the time when Florry Carfax had been Florry Davidson still, and the Reverend Bertie had not yet appeared on the horizon, seemed already separated from the present by an

almost immeasurable gulf of time, as she looked back upon them. The correspondence which Florry had opened while Lena's honeymoon was still in its first quarter had not, of course, maintained itself at the height of enthusiastic sympathy with which it had commenced.

The interest Florry felt in the conversation which was likely to pass between Lena and her husband was just as keen as ever, and she was quite as strongly of opinion that it would do her friend good to be "silly" for a reasonable space of time; but having once expressed these laudable sentiments on paper, and not being provided with any further material in the shape of confidences in return, she felt unable to sit down and repeat them at intervals of a week or ten days. And the delightful anticipation she had expressed of being one day able to see Lena in "a house of her own" had not yet been realised.

There is in nine cases out of ten some delicacy on a bride's part in making the first

suggestion to her husband of the expediency of asking under their joint roof some of those who are dear to her own soul, but strangers to his. It is always possible that the expression of such a desire may be misconstrued into something to which it is absolutely foreign ; and if the husband is not prone to suspect that the long-dreaded tedium and weariness of his society have at length set in, the wife is at any rate often unwilling to do anything which may render such a suspicion possible.

Rothery Selfert, who had a noble confidence in the all-sufficient delights of his own society, and a belief that any woman ought to be more than content to wrap her being up in his, was not a likely man to fall into such apprehensions ; but Lena had been none the less anxious to do nothing which might tend to shake the complacency of his confidence, or desecrate so holy a belief. As has been said, she had almost entirely severed herself even from her nearest relations, since her

marriage, and remembering the depreciatory remarks which poor Florry's letter had called forth, had felt it quite impossible hitherto to suggest that her husband might form a more correct judgment by making the personal acquaintance of the writer.

Just now, when her husband seemed to have removed himself further from her than ever, and the vague and formless cloud which had been gathering between them had actually shaped itself into the first verbal disagreement of their married life, it was almost an embarrassment to hear from Lydcombe that Florry was coming up to town to stay with her mother and sisters, and looked forward to visiting her "dear old Lena" once more as among the chief of her anticipated pleasures.

She tried to tell her husband, as soon as she had read Florry's letter, something of its contents; but since he had shocked and repelled her, two days before, in her effort to claim the privileges of a wife on behalf of her

cousin, she had hardly been able to bring herself to open her lips in his presence about the commonest affairs of their daily life. A man less certain of his own absolute merit and supremacy might have fancied that she was sullen.

Rothery Selfert only regarded her as cowed and submissive, and though it was not his intention that his wife should always remain in such a dominated condition, thought that, for a time, it was not an unhealthy experience for her to undergo. In reality, she was suffering and prostrate, and even the effort which she had made to resist her husband's will in the matter had but seared, as with a hot iron, the wounds which his unreasoning harshness had inflicted.

Her husband never returned from the Temple until nearly seven o'clock, and she had her afternoons almost entirely at her own disposal. Of course she need feel no difficulty about seeing Florry, or any other

visitor who liked to call at such times, but it galled her to think that she could not in any way return the hospitality which had been so abundantly showered upon her in the Devonshire coombes, without her husband's knowledge—in fact, though she did not like the word, without his *permission*.

Surely, however great the difference might be between the minds of a man and a woman, there ought to be some sort of equality between husband and wife with regard to the guests who should be asked to join them at the table they shared in common!

Some such thought as this was certainly present to her mind, as she returned the ardour of Florry's kisses, and strove to look as if the glories of Wimpole Street, and the grand piano which looked quite insignificant in the corner of her drawing-room, were enough to satisfy all the yearnings and indefinite aspirations of which she and Florry, in the days of their girlhood, had whispered to each other with lowered voices.

Florry, who would not for worlds have ventured to go about London alone, and, even when accompanied, felt scruples about entrusting herself to the dissipated arms of a London hansom, had brought her sister Mildred with her as a guide and protectress, so that something of the embarrassment necessarily felt, where a great display of affection is expected, was relieved.

Mildred, or Milly Davidson, as a few only among the more intimate of her friends ventured to call her, was only a year younger than Florry according to actual reckoning by the almanack, and at least ten years her senior in language and general deportment; and Lena, who had only known her when she was a little girl, felt quite a chill as Milly extended her hand, so studiously flattened that the finger-nails almost bent backwards toward the wrist, for her hostess to grasp. When the varied greetings were over, the three ladies sat looking at each other, none of them knowing very well what to say next.

"Dear old Lena!" remarked Mrs. Carfax at last, trying to feel as she had done when driving her guest to Saltham Station through the Devonshire lanes.

Lena said nothing, but pressed her friend's hand affectionately, as if to signify that notwithstanding the gaudy trappings of splendour with which she was surrounded, she was content to be as dear as, if older than, she had been before her exaltation.

Mildred, who had never been intimate enough with anybody to be called dear or old, sat watching her sister's transports with calm superiority, wondering within herself what possible motives could be powerful enough to cause her fellow-creatures to venture on so much display. Mildred was tall and placid, with a prettily-rounded forehead and a slightly aquiline nose, and had not yet discovered that the world contained anything so calculated to excite her affectionate interest as the early week-day services at St. Agatha's. She looked upon

both her sister and Mrs. Selfert as renegades from the cause of their sex, who had forfeited for the sake of worldly advancement all that made a woman's life desirable or even tolerable in properly-constituted minds.

"You haven't forgotten the days you spent at dear old Lydcombe," continued Florry, emboldened by the success of her first remark. Everything was dear and old with Florry when her feelings were at all excited.

"Of course not!" said Lena, laughing, "nor Mr. Roberts the curate either. I hope the new one has his nose under better control, and does not allow it to begin bleeding in church! How is Mr. Carfax?"

"He can't get away just now, because there's no one else to take the Saltham duty," explained Florry, with a momentary feeling of compunction at having forgotten Bertie's existence for ten minutes.

"And Bertie junior?" asked Lena.

"Oh, he's with me, of course," said the proud mother; "I'd have brought him, only

I thought Mr. Selfert might not appreciate such a visitor. Aren't you longing to see him again?"

It is hardly necessary to remark that the last pronoun did not refer to the eminent barrister who had been mentioned.

Lena tried to express in suitable terms the anxiety she felt to hold once more in her arms the youthful scion of the house of Carfax, while Mildred's lip curled in greater contempt than ever. Except as rough material to grow up into choir-boys, Mildred did not see the use of babies at all.

"Is Mr. Selfert always out in the afternoons?" continued Florry, having exhausted her own domestic joys, and thinking it time that Lena should have a turn. "I do so wonder if I shall like him!"

It did not occur to Florry to wonder whether he would like her, taking the feminine view of a bridegroom as something lent for exhibition during a limited period.

Lena smiled with feeble heroism, and gave

Florry to understand that all imaginable male perfections were united in Mr. Selfert, so that even the fastidious taste which had selected the Reverend Bertie must inevitably be satisfied. Rather to Florry's disappointment, however, no immediate plan for the gratification of her curiosity was proposed, and the conversation, however gushing, was beginning to flag, when the door opened and Frank Morden was announced.

Frank was not in search of the distractions of society, and would willingly have retreated rather than face strangers in his present state of anxiety; but Lena, who was beginning to feel with shame that she was getting a little tired of Florry, would not allow him to escape.

"This is my cousin Frank, Florry; you have often heard me speak of him," she said.

Of course Frank liked to think that he had been often spoken of, even though the speaking had ended in such unsatisfactory

results, and he tried to look as if he had never had a higher aspiration than such cousinly affection. Nevertheless, he felt rather sulky as he took the seat by Miss Mildred Davidson which was pointed out to him. He had come to Wimpole Street to indulge in the luxury of talking about his troubles—a luxury which, in the society of that young lady, he certainly could not indulge in—and felt as if he had been cheated out of the sympathy which properly belonged to him.

“I thought I should find you alone about this time,” he said, almost as if he had a right to complain of the presence of visitors in Mrs. Selfert’s drawing-room. It was certainly a very rude speech, and a young man has no right to expect that, at five o’clock in the afternoon, even his cousin will be “not at home” to all visitors except himself. Florry, however, who had heard in former days all about Frank’s misplaced devotion, looked upon him with reverent eyes, as one who had

loved in vain, and in whom much might be pardoned in consequence. Miss Davidson, however, knew nothing of the softer emotions which had aforetime thrilled the young man's heart, and was by no means insensible to the want of politeness which he had exhibited in making his complaint.

"You must postpone your business till to-morrow, Frank," said Lena, trying to improve matters. "Don't you think you can manage to amuse Miss Davidson for a little. We have ever so much to talk about, haven't we, Florry?"

Florry gave a little gasp of assent, intended to signify the immensity of her own conversational resources; and the dead silence, which such an appeal was naturally calculated to produce, followed as a matter of course.

"Poor boy!" said Lena, when Frank had at last released himself from his uncongenial position, and gone off with a kind of feeling that he was unfit, in his present state of mind,

to deal with the hollowness and vanity of this world. "He is really such a nice fellow, when you get to know him properly, but he is not a bit like himself just now. I have been so sorry for him!"

"Is he in bad health?" asked Miss Davidson, who was incapable of seeing that there are finer fibres in a man's organisation which are capable of suffering than those in connection with his lungs, liver and digestion.

"Oh no!" replied Lena, feeling personally insulted by the supposition that her sympathy could be wasted on mere physical disorders. "But he is in great trouble just now, and comes to me for advice, poor fellow!"

"Of course he hasn't got over his disappointment yet," said Florry sympathetically. "I wonder how he can bear to come and see you at all, but I suppose it is better that he should learn to get accustomed to it."

"There isn't anything of that sort at all," said Lena, who had determined that such dangerous ideas should be put away from

Frank's mind altogether, and did not like the suggestion that even the perfume of a sentiment might still linger there. "Only it happens that I can help him just now, and nobody else can."

"Of course Mr. Selfert's position must enable him to do a great deal," said Florry, feeling snubbed, and anxious to say something which should prove the entire unity of her friend's mind with her own.

Miss Mildred Davidson saw by this time that there had been peculiar reasons for the impatience of her society which the young man had displayed, and began to wonder how far Mrs. Selfert was fit and able to lead her cousin out of the quagmires in which he was no doubt wandering astray. She knew that the wickedness of man is very great, especially between the ages of eighteen and forty, and that the woman who attempts to guide and direct such errant sheep back to their own proper pastures, undertakes a task full of dangerous responsibilities.

“I suppose it’s something about money,” she said, with a little thrill of virtuous horror. “Young men have never any idea of the immorality of getting into debt.”

“It’s not that exactly,” said Lena, feeling a little embarrassed, and then both Florry and her sister knew the nature of Frank’s troubles. Are not nine-tenths of the snares which are set to catch young men’s souls, though themselves almost infinite in variety, at least rendered attractive by the same bait?

CHAPTER VIII.

MESSRS. HOUNDSELL AND GOBY, when communications were first opened with them by the champion of Frank Morden's interests, declined at first to enter into any negotiations with that gentleman on the subject. Their client, said the managing clerk—with whom Hurst Atlee, after a little pressure, obtained an interview—had instructed them that in no case would she entertain the idea of any compromise of her rights, and that she would much prefer that the amount of compensation she was to receive should be decided upon by the verdict of a jury. He might say—and did say, in fact—that her object was not so much to obtain pecuniary damages

(though she was by no means disposed to waive them), as to remove any slur which certain indiscretions on the gentleman's part might have left upon her character. Instructions had already been sent to counsel to prepare a statement of claim, and really Messrs. Houndsell and Goby thought it would be far more satisfactory for both parties, now that the matter had reached its present stage, that the unfortunate difference between them should be adjusted by the natural and beautiful process that the constitution of the country provided for such emergencies.

Hurst Atlee, however, was quite prepared for the arguments with which Messrs. Houndsell and Goby's managing clerk overwhelmed him, and knew that he was not expected to pay much attention to these necessary preliminaries. The managing clerk gave way at the proper moment, and relented so far that an arrangement was made for an interview at which both the

parties immediately concerned should be present, as well as young Mr. Goby, the gentleman who undertook the common law branch of the business which accrued to the firm.

“I don’t think it’ll be of any use, though, Mr. Atlee,” concluded the managing clerk; “I don’t indeed. There never would be any cases taken before a jury if this one didn’t go.”

Atlee tried in vain to get some approximate idea of the figure at which Miss Deacle’s ideas of compensation would be realised, but the managing clerk was far too wary to give him any such aid.

“There’s nothing like twelve men in a box, when a sum’s got to be named,” said the managing clerk, with enthusiastic admiration for the institutions of his country, and Atlee was obliged for the time to be contented with assenting to this general proposition.

Frank, to whom the idea of the proposed conference was at first horribly distasteful,

made up his mind at last that its terrors must be boldly dealt with, and even took a sort of pleasure in anticipating the calm defiance with which, sheltered beneath Hurst Atlee's well-proved shield, he should hurl back in Miss Deacle's face the perjuries with which she was prepared to stain her soul.

"You'd better say as little as possible, you know, if you'll take my advice," said his protector to him at the last of one of those long consultations which were now almost the only relaxations of Frank's life, but were certainly not among the most congenial moments of Atlee's existence.

Frank, who had made up in his mind exactly what he would say to Miss Deacle, resolved that notwithstanding such advice, he would let that lady see that he was not afraid of her. If Hurst Atlee, indeed, and young Mr. Goby, and the managing clerk were all present at the interview, what cause could he have for fear?

It had been arranged that the conference should be held in a large first-floor room at the Grosvenor Hotel, Westminster—a room which was sufficiently near the scene of the professional engagements of Mr. Atlee and young Mr. Goby, and was besides the sort of apartment in which it was to be presumed that the clients of Messrs. Houndsell and Goby were accustomed to dwell. Young Mr. Goby, who adopted its splendours as his own with the utmost readiness, was cleaning his muddy boots carefully on the carpet when Frank and his champion entered, and Miss Deacle, who had been watching the operation with the utmost interest, hastily withdrew the luminous depths of her eyes within the sanctity of her veil. Miss Deacle was accompanied by her father, who came, as a matter of course, as the natural exponent of the views which the modesty peculiar to her sex would prevent her from uttering, and also by the fat old woman, who was there to see that no further outrage on her delicacy

was offered by the unprincipled young reprobate who was now paying the price of his iniquities. When Frank saw the man whose brandy he had drunk, and whose tobacco he had smoked, sitting no longer in his shirt-sleeves by Lizzie's side, he began to realise for the first time how sacred a thing the indignation of an injured parent may be.

The managing clerk, who acted on this occasion as a sort of mutual friend of all parties concerned, introduced Hurst Atlee to Mr. and Mrs. Deacle, and also to young Mr. Goby, leaving Frank out in the cold, as a gentleman whose acquaintance he had not himself yet had the pleasure of making.

Young Mr. Goby, who took the head of the table at which they all sat down, had on a very sporting kind of shirt, highly ornamented with skulls, very neatly designed in mauve on a white ground, and he wore a pin that was apparently the model of the tombstone from beneath which the pattern for the skulls had been taken. He had an incipient

moustache, that was far from looking professional, and his face had the general appearance of having been wide awake all night to watch the growth of that decoration during the silent hours. It was quite evident to the most casual observer that young Mr. Goby was not as yet trusted to transact even the common-law business of the firm, without the superintendence and chaperonage of the managing clerk; but nevertheless Frank, who cherished a lively remembrance of the little slip of blue paper which had come to him with Mr. Goby's name upon it, shrank from meeting young Mr. Goby's eye.

Most of the talking was done by Hurst Atlee and the managing clerk, Frank and Mr. Deacle holding themselves in reserve in the rear of the contending parties. Lizzie remained in the background, sitting in a window where nobody had a very good view of her except young Mr. Goby, and looked as modestly conscious of being the *belli teterrima causa* as she could manage to do

with her veil down. Young Mr. Goby, who had not yet learned the difficult lesson of keeping business and pleasure entirely apart, was divided between the admiration of Lizzie's figure and the necessity of keeping an attentive eye on the prowess of the managing clerk; and Mr. Deacle tried to look as if he was not wondering whether his paternal duties would be concluded that morning in time for him to get back to the scene of his daily labours before the first afternoon distribution of the evening papers. He carried a big stick in his hand, and Frank felt that there were other dangers in store for him, if by any means he should succeed in slipping out of the legal net.

So far as Frank could follow the discussion, the managing clerk was still engaged in eulogising the British system of trial by jury, and young Mr. Goby, who was trying to clean his face with the corner of his pocket-handkerchief without attracting attention, every now and then intimated the entire

concurrence of the firm with the views of the managing clerk.

"I should like to hear what the young lady has to say on the subject," said Atlee at last. "She must be conscious herself how little she has to gain from the publicity of her story, if her advisers are not."

"She ain't got nothing to say," growled Mr. Deacle, throwing an eye of peculiar disfavour on his foe. "Only she means to have her rights, and I'm here, as her father, to see that she gets them. That's about it, isn't it, Liz?"

Lizzie, thus appealed to, turned round at the sound of the parental voice, and lifted her veil for the first time, giving Hurst Atlee an opportunity of criticising the charms which had led his protégé so far astray.

"I always did think that Mr. Morden would have behaved like a gentleman," she said, with a pathetic glance that was meant to go straight to Frank's heart, and—

incidentally and provisionally — to that of Mr. Goby. “Of course I don’t want to have any more exposure if it can be avoided.”

“Don’t be silly, Liz,” said the fat old woman in an undertone, and a convulsive movement of the lower part of Lizzie’s petticoats indicated that the young lady was acknowledging the maternal remonstrance by attempting to kick her shins.

Hurst Atlee, whose face had worn an amused smile since he had obtained his first fair view of the features of Mr. Goby’s client, interrupted these little endearments before Miss Deacle had effected her purpose.

“I really think, Mr. Goby,” he said with much politeness, “that Miss Deacle and I could settle this matter better by ourselves—without, of course, meaning to depreciate the valuable services which your firm is generally able to render. I will consult with Mr. Morden, and after I have said a few words to

him, I have no doubt but that I shall be in a position to make Miss Deacle a satisfactory offer. Of course she can exercise her own discretion about consulting you as to its sufficiency, but I think it will be better to communicate with her direct in the first place."

"Isn't that rather unprofessional, Gribble?" said young Mr. Goby, feebly appealing to the managing clerk.

"Never heard of such a thing in my life," said Gribble with austerity. "That's what comes of a gentleman trying to do his own business, without going to a solicitor in the regular way."

Hurst Atlee, however, was not to be deterred from taking his intended path by Mr. Gribble's denunciations of its irregularity, and insisted that he should be allowed to manage matters his own way.

Frank was appealed to, almost pathetically, by Mr. Goby, not to allow his own interests to be ruined by the ill-advised obstinacy of

his champion ; but Frank declared that he understood nothing of the technicalities of professional etiquette which were involved, and had the greatest confidence in leaving his friend, Mr. Atlee, to conduct the affair as he thought best.

The same absolute renunciation of self was expressed, in slightly different language, by Mr. Deacle ; but Lizzie did not declare her views on the subject as clearly as Mr. Goby and Mr. Gribble desired ; and Hurst Atlee became more confirmed in his view that the matter would not ultimately be referred to the collective sagacity of twelve men in a box after all.

“ You must enter an appearance, you know, Mr. Morden,” said the managing clerk, obstinately ignoring Mr. Atlee’s assurance that no further steps in the action would be required. “ You can’t help yourself, unless you want judgment signed, and we’ll have the statement of claim delivered as soon as possible.”

"You needn't trouble yourself about that, Mr. Gribble," said Atlee, with an intensely irritating smile of superiority. "I've no doubt you'll hear from your clients when I've communicated with them."

"It'll be sent on, under cover, to us, that's all," said Gribble, rising in anger to put an end to the dispute, and looking alternately to Miss Deacle's father and the gentleman of whom he was accustomed to speak as "our Mr. Goby," for moral support.

"Come along, Morden," said Hurst Atlee, taking up his hat without thinking it necessary to make any more formal adieux even to the ladies who were present.

Miss Deacle had put down her veil again, but it was not thick enough to conceal a certain amount of agitation—more, perhaps, than such a strictly business interview ought to have produced in a young lady of her equable temperament and experience.

"You're uncommonly well out of this scrape, I can tell you," said the barrister,

when they got into the street. "I don't think Messrs. Houndsell and Goby will get any further than the statement of claim this time."

"Do you think there is any chance of their dropping it?" asked Frank, who had not understood much that had passed, and was quite in the dark as to the causes of his champion's gratification.

"I think you're about the luckiest fellow in London!" said Atlee. "Upon my word, it's astonishing how oddly some of these things come about! If the girl had only been behind the bar of that eating-house all her life, she'd have done you! Lucky I've got a good memory for faces, isn't it?"

"She hasn't got the kind of face a man would be likely to forget," said Frank, unable to restrain a certain amount of pride in the rarity of the feminine attractions which had led him astray, now that a safe return to the fold appeared once more a possibility. "I don't understand where you've seen her, that's all."

“It’s the simplest thing in the world,” said the barrister with some complacency. “You know old Dunlop, who used to go our circuit so long? He used to make a pot of money, but he had expensive tastes, and I don’t believe he knew himself where it all went to. Well, he had a peculiar fancy, among other things, for setting up small suburban establishments of his own, and your friend Miss Lizzie certainly kept house for him two or three years ago. She didn’t stay long, but old Dunlop always knew what had become of her; and I don’t think she’d stand cross-examination in the box very well. You may depend upon it they won’t deliver their statement of claim.”

“Do you mean that I shan’t hear any more of it?” asked Frank, incredulous of the great deliverance which had come upon him.

“Well, I’d offer her a trifle or so—say twenty pounds—just to cover what she’s out of pocket, and buy her a new dress. She

knows very well I remember her, and you may depend upon it she'll jump at it."

The prospect of ridding himself entirely of the incubus by which he had been so long oppressed, at the small outlay of twenty pounds, seemed to Frank almost too good to be true, and would have been an entirely blissful one, had it not been for the rude disclosure it brought with it of the unworthiness of the fetish at whose feet he had been grovelling so long. Of course she had behaved badly throughout all this business with the Gobys and Gribbles, but he had been willing to believe that in this respect the fault lay not so much with her as with the fat old woman and the man of whose hospitality he had been forced to partake the Sunday after the tragedy at Gravesend. But he had thought all along that, except for some slight suspicion of the eating-house in her manner and tastes, she had been deserving even of greater devotion than such as he had offered her, and had taken some

pride in the evident impression which her manifold charms had produced upon those of his acquaintance who had cast respectful glances upon her like young Danebury. It was disagreeable to think that he had been the dupe throughout of a vulgar, common adventuress, and had been cajoled by her tawdry affectation of virtue into confiding to her those secrets of his heart which should have been held most sacred. All this was very disagreeable, but he was consoled by remembering that had not the quagmire into which he had wandered been very dirty, twenty pounds would not have been sufficient to pull him out of it.

CHAPTER IX.

IT was impossible that Rothery Selfert should long remain unaware that there was a secret of some sort existing between his wife and the younger man, of whom he had once cautioned her that it would be well that he should not be made too much of. He had become by degrees conscious that the complacency with which he had regarded his wife's supposed submission to his will, had been at any rate premature; and the idea that he had, for the first time, failed to impress her with a conviction of the superiority of his judgment to hers was very disquieting to him. Nevertheless he did not suppose that she had absolutely dared to set up her

wishes in opposition to his own, and as Frank's visits to Wimpole Street did not generally come under his observation, it did not occur to him to connect the two causes of his uneasiness. It had been impossible for him to dissent from the timid proposal that Lena summoned up courage to make, that she should be allowed to extend the hospitality of at least one meal to Florry during the latter's stay in town, nor could he with decency absent himself altogether from his house on that day, but he could not get rid of the consciousness that he was being made an exhibition of, and despite the grandeur of his Jovian brow as he sat at the head of his dinner-table, the whole ceremony was revolting to his pride. In the eyes of Miss Davidson, who was also one of the guests on the occasion, his attitude was one of calm and manly dignity, and she felt some difficulty in realising how so great and gifted a being could have stooped to the childish and almost vulgar emotions which a successful

bridegroom is popularly supposed to experience.

During most of the evening Florry talked in whispers to "dear old Lena," being too much awed by the essential differences between Mr. Selfert and her Bertie to endeavour to develop that fraternal intimacy with him which she had thought it so desirable to encourage between her own husband and Mrs. Selfert.

"Do you know I should be rather afraid of him," she said in a tone of suppressed admiration when they escaped to the drawing-room after dinner. "It must be so strange to be alone with him—but then you were always quite different to other girls."

Lena tried to look as if the familiarity of a few months had revealed to her all the mysteries which lent solemnity to her husband's brow; but she felt painfully conscious that she was imitating the expression of the man who stands outside a Punch-and-Judy

show to play the pipes, and knows all about what goes on inside the curtain.

"I don't think strangers often get on very fast with him," she said, apologetically.

"He doesn't seem to me like a man who would care for the trivialities of women's society," remarked Miss Davidson, in a tone that appeared to indicate her opinion that Mr. Selfert might easily have chosen a helpmeet more likely to satisfy the greatness of his soul than her sister's friend. "I suppose his time is very much occupied with things of greater interest."

"Of course he is very busy," said Lena. "Very often I do not see anything of him even after dinner, and he is always away from nine o'clock in the morning."

"That must be dreadfully dull for you," said Florry, horrified at the idea of anything being able to isolate her from her Bertie in such a manner, and becoming more and more convinced that she herself was blessed above all women in her destiny.

"I suppose you have plenty of visitors," said Miss Davidson somewhat maliciously, "as you have all your relations so close to you. Mr. Frank Morden lives in town with his father and mother, does he not?"

"Yes," answered Lena, thinking how little of her relations she did see; "but they live a long way off, and I have hardly met them at all since my marriage. Of course Frank comes to see me sometimes."

"Poor boy!" said Florry sympathetically; "I should think it must be very painful to him to accept Mr. Selfert's assistance, however kindly it may be offered."

"Hush!" said Miss Davidson in a voice that was, perhaps intentionally, quite audible as Mr. Selfert entered, with the Jovian expression on his brow a good deal disfigured by a deeper frown than it commonly wore, and a general expression of what in any other man would have run a very good chance of being called ill-humour.

"Will you have some tea?" said Lena

rather faintly, reading the signs which presaged a coming storm, but Mr. Selfert only nodded his head, and that certainly in an ungraceful manner, as he accepted the proffered attention, after which the general conversation began to flag. Florry stared at the master of the house a good deal, certainly, whenever she thought she could do so without being caught in the act; and the consciousness of her inquisitive gaze so fretted Rothery Selfert beyond endurance that he was compelled to address some remarks to her on the salubrity of Lydcombe, and the advantages of Devonshire generally as a home for those whose avocations did not oblige them to reside in London; but notwithstanding the information which she was able to give him on these points, it cannot be said that the discussion ever assumed a very animated character, and all parties were relieved when the cab came to put an end to their sufferings.

Lena knew instinctively that her husband

was going to make himself unpleasant to her, and would gladly have postponed listening to what he had to say until the next morning ; but it is one of the drawbacks inseparable from married life that such postponement cannot be made without the consent of both the parties concerned, and Rothery Selfert was by no means disposed to waive any of his marital privileges in this respect.

“ There is a letter for you which you had better read,” he said briefly, holding out at the same time an envelope directed in a hand which was strange to his wife. It was by no means strange, however, to Rothery Selfert, who had enjoyed as good opportunities as any man for studying its peculiarities.

Lena took it from him, only understanding that something was wrong, and turned crimson when she looked at the signature, and saw that it was from Hurst Atlee. She knew that it necessarily related to the matter in which she was conscious of having violated her husband's wishes, and was unwilling to

be compelled to read it in his presence, but she was not conscious that it was the mere fact of her receiving a letter from such a man as Atlee at all which was so distasteful to his feelings. She held it in her hand for a minute or two without attempting to look at its contents, and would have put it into her pocket without speaking had she been allowed to do so.

"I can hardly think that you have any reason for being unwilling that I should see it," he said in a tone of suppressed anger, and Lena felt that she had no option but to make a clean breast of her transgression.

"There is a reason," she said boldly, "because it is about my cousin Frank's business. I was obliged to ask some one else to help me, since you would not."

As she said this, she saw his frown turn as it were to stone on his brow, and almost regretted her disobedience.

"You have acted wrongly," he said, with an assumption of judicial calmness which was

more galling to listen to than an outburst of fury would have been. "I hope that on reflection you will see how unbecoming your conduct has been. It was my express wish that you should not be mixed up in so discreditable an affair at all, and you have actually condescended to enter into a clandestine correspondence with a stranger in relation to it. Who is this man Atlee, that he and you should be writing to each other without my knowledge?"

"I have written to him once only in my life," said Lena with some spirit; "and there has been nothing clandestine in the matter. When I promised my cousin to help him out of his difficulties, I never thought it possible that you would refuse to gratify me by assisting him—I should never have promised him at all had it not been for my confidence in you. Of course, when I found I was mistaken, my promise remained all the same, and I was obliged to ask the only man I knew who could help me to do so. You can

read his letter, if "you like, and judge for yourself whether there has been anything 'clandestine' in what I have done."

Mr. Selfert listened to his wife's justification of her conduct without the movement of a single line in his face, or the slightest appearance of interest in what she was saying, as if he did not admit the possibility of his ever having used an expression which might be misunderstood, or a word which he might wish to withdraw.

"I do not wish to discuss the matter until you see it in a different light," he replied, in a voice that was studiously sweet and calm, and in itself an incidental rebuke to poor Lena for her warmth. "You should not have been guided by any promises which you had been injudicious enough to make, but by my known wishes. And as to whether such a correspondence as this is a becoming one for you to enter into, you must allow that my judgment is superior to yours. It will be unfortunate if you do not accustom

yourself to defer to my wishes and my judgment for the future." Though it would perhaps be going too far to say that Mr. Selfert derived any gratification from the rebuke he had been called upon to deliver to his wife, he was quite satisfied with the manner in which that rebuke had been administered, and waited a few minutes in the expectation of some proper acknowledgment of its wisdom. "Perhaps it is useless for me to expect you to agree with me," he said, "but I should be glad to know how you intend to act for the future. It is quite impossible that this sort of thing should be allowed to recur often."

"I do not know what you expect me to say," answered his wife, proudly, seeing that her husband was not likely to weigh fairly any attempt at self-defence which she might make. "I think you have been—unreasonable, and it would be more unreasonable still to expect me to admit that I have done anything to justify the language you have used."

Then she swept from the room with more

grace and majesty around her retreating steps than in all the terrors which ever flashed from Rothery Selfert's brow, and he saw her no more that night. As he threw himself upon an extemporised couch in his dressing-room, he almost regretted that he had not impressed her with a greater aspect of severity. Nothing was more clear to his mind that, in conjugal disputes, the husband only has the right to insist that the other is wrong.

Lena, though she did not acknowledge to herself that she had done anything that was wrong—anything more, at any rate, than a mere venial act of imprudence—spent the night in an agony of shame and agitation. Whatever misgivings she might have had as to the extent of her own error, she had no doubt whatever but that her husband had been grossly and offensively in the wrong; and now that, for the second time at least, she had found herself to have been miserably mistaken in her estimate of his moral nature,

she felt as one who sees impending over him the affliction of blindness, and wonders how the long years of his life, to be spent without the blessings of God's sun which he has considered as certainly his own as the air he breathes, are to be rendered tolerable. Her aspirations and desires had not differed so much from those of other girls of her age in kind as in their purity and intensity, and little as she had comprehended of the mysteries of that double existence to which she had seen others of her own sex so strongly attached, she had understood that, for her at any rate, happiness was only to be accomplished in the perfection of that union with another and a stronger nature, which her inexperience had led her to believe followed universally, as a matter of course, from the moment when husband and wife stood before the altar together hand in hand. She knew now that the happiness of such a union was an impossibility for her, and with her eyes opened to the imperfections and even nauseous

elements in the character of the man to whom she had been willing to attach herself, no longer in very truth desired it. Until that evening there had always been to her a dignity in his face, and a look of command in his eye, which had impressed her with an awe easily enough mistaken for love; but when he used the look of dignity as so much mummerly with which to bedeck his unjust anger, and looked in her face with the eye not of a ruler but of a bully, the aspect of the man was altogether changed, and in his affectation of superior wisdom he seemed to grow smaller and meaner before her eyes. Then she thought of the parsonage at Lydcombe, and the weak feminine adoration of Florry for the common barn-door fowl of humanity which she deemed it an honour to be allowed to worship, and wondered at her own folly in venturing to despise the pettiness of such domestic bliss. What does it matter if the man to whom a woman is tied is not in truth super-excellent above his

fellows, so long as he does not rudely shatter the rose-coloured glass through which he is seen, and force an odious disenchantment upon the senses of the woman who takes a pleasure in calling him her lord ?

Her husband went out the next morning without seeing her, and she was left unfettered by any direct command as to the visitors she should receive. She knew from Hurst Atlee's letter that he intended to call in the afternoon, and if she had been expressly ordered to deny herself to him she would of course have done so, but she did not believe that her husband felt any actual jealousy of the man simply because he had written to her, and disliked the idea of doing anything which would seem to show that she thought such a hateful idea possible. Though she did her best to receive him with her ordinary manner, she felt that it would be a mistake to allow him to remain entirely in ignorance of the displeasure with which her husband regarded the fact that she had taken him into her confidence.

"You got my letter?" he said, in a tone of jubilant triumph, as soon as he was well inside the room. "Master Frank will be more careful another time, I fancy; it isn't every man who gets off so cheaply."

"You have actually got rid of that dreadful woman for him altogether?" said Lena with enthusiasm.

"Oh, yes!" said Atlee, exulting in his prowess. "She threw up her cards directly she found we were going to play it out, and was only too glad to draw her stakes. It cost Master Frank a twenty-pound note, but nothing worse."

"How good you have been to take so much trouble!" said Lena gratefully, feeling that there was no reason why she should not give the man the thanks that were his due, inasmuch as his aid, though dearly purchased, had certainly been effectual. "What would he have done without you!"

"No trouble at all!" answered Atlee, who had already detected a certain embarrass-

ment in Mrs. Selfert's manner, but was without any clue to its cause. "I gave him a hint or two about steering clear of such scrapes for the future, and he took it very well—awfully delighted of course at having been able to keep the thing out of the hearing of his father and mother."

"That is the unfortunate part of it," said Lena. "I was obliged to try and keep it a secret, when he asked me, was I not? And it is so disagreeable to have to keep a secret from anybody."

"It isn't very easy—especially when half-a-dozen people know it to start with. I can quite understand that Mr. Selfert would dislike the whole thing—but it was an unpleasant necessity."

His own envelope was lying on the table, and suspecting something of what had passed, he already blamed his want of tact in sending anything so calculated to put a lady in a false position, when she wished, for however good a reason, to keep any secret from her hus-

band's knowledge. "Selfert is such a wrong-headed ass," he thought to himself, "and this is just the kind of thing he'd bully the poor little woman about!"

It was easy enough to understand from the poor little woman's silence, that Mr. Selfert *had* disliked the whole thing very much, and even that a certain amount of bullying had been undergone.

"Perhaps it would be as well if I were to explain the whole history of the thing to him!"

"Oh no!" said Lena, whose lips were beginning to tremble, and who felt almost degraded at the idea that this man should know anything of the humiliation to which she had been exposed at her husband's hands. "Of course he did not like to think that anything had been done without his knowledge."

"I don't see that at all," said Atlee stubbornly, and speaking as if the whole matter was half a joke. "It doesn't do for any one man to want to know everything—not even Mr. Selfert." He saw that Lena's face was

turned away to hide the tears with which her eyes were fast filling, and inwardly raged against the domineering obstinacy of the man he knew so well. "Don't take the edge off the pleasure I feel at having been able to do you a service," he said, holding out his hand to say "good-bye."

"You have been very good," said Lena again, repressing with an effort the hysterical inclination she felt to burst into tears. She remembered that her husband had treated her with almost the same tender consideration before she had become his wife, and wondered whether the manner of all men would be so changed by the infusion into it of a little marital authority.

It was not until she was alone again that she broke into a fit of weeping, reproaching herself, amid her sobs, for having allowed a man she had only known for a few weeks to see how soon the clouds had gathered over the early sunshine of her married life.

CHAPTER X.

THERE was indeed, as Hurst Atlee had triumphantly announced, desolation in Gotha Street, New Road, and discomfiture in the tents of Houndsell and Goby. Notwithstanding the protestations of Mr. Gribble against the unprofessional course Mr. Atlee announced his intention of adopting, and his assertion that the statement of claim would be delivered without delay or hesitation, the action which had been commenced did not in fact attain that stage of its development, and Houndsell and Goby were compelled to retire ignominiously from the fray.

Mr. and Mrs. Deacle, indeed, who were primarily responsible for the costs to be in-

curred, were by no means willing that Frank should be allowed so easily to escape, and the fat old woman was especially vindictive against him, appearing to bulge and swell into new and strange shapes in her inability to contain her wrath.

“Don’t be a fool, mother,” said Lizzie, who probably understood the peculiar effect that cross-examination might have upon her constitution better even than her parents, and certainly knew the present value of twenty pounds quite as well. “I tell you it ain’t any use. I do believe there’s no good at all in one’s trying to better one’s self, as things are.”

Whatever efforts Miss Deacle had made to better the station in life in which she found herself had certainly not yet been blessed with success, and she returned for a while to the unambitious but peaceful seclusion of her uncle’s eating-house in the Strand, until future prospects of elevation should unfold themselves. She had hoped to get

some little souvenir out of the balance of Frank's twenty pounds, but the valuable nature of the services which had been rendered by Messrs. Houndsell and Goby in the matter put this quite out of the question.

Frank, who had of course no idea what the help his cousin had given him had cost her, did not for a moment suspect that there was anything wrong in Wimpole Street, and took every possible occasion of calling there to chant his song of deliverance. No direction had been given to Lena by her husband that she should abstain from seeing her cousin, inasmuch as, though he would willingly have shut the door in the face of one and all of her relations, he disliked the idea of calling attention to his domestic difficulties by such very pronounced action. And in all her humiliation, Lena could conceive no more intolerable form of it than the revelation of her misery to the boy who had worshipped her as the incarnation of all that was beautiful and fortunate in womankind.

Fallen as she was in truth from the pedestal on which she had set herself, and where she had believed that her equality with one of the gods of the earth would have been her glory, she would not have had her degradation exposed to the humblest of her former votaries, and strove to speak to others of her husband as if she still sat hand-in-hand with him on the throne of which she had dreamed in her girlhood. Before such as Florry she still endeavoured to talk with pride of his achievements, and was almost cruel in the contempt with which she listened to the second-hand enunciation of the Reverend Bertie's teachings. The fame of the *Periodic Review* had spread even as far as the Devonshire lanes, and rural divines had risen in their wrath to criticise the theories which Rothery Selfert had propounded in its pages.

"Bertie says he can hardly think Mr. Selfert is serious in some of his arguments as to what Christianity teaches us," remarked Florry one day when she had ventured to discuss

the merits of "Exagogé" with the author's wife. "I do wish Mr. Selfert could have heard his sermon last month on the Epistle to the Ephesians."

"I dare say it was quite good and proper for a country congregation," said Lena, with a great contempt for Bertie and all the Ephesians in her tone; "but you can hardly suppose that Mr. Selfert has not considered such matters for himself. Of course a clergyman is bound to look at things from a particular point of view."

Florry did not like hearing the Vicar of Lydcombe accused of narrow or imperfect views, but was not bold enough to take up the cudgels in his behalf with such an antagonist, who could venture to despise country congregations, and the sermons of an ordained priest.

"I can't agree with you, dear, you know, you are so clever," she contented herself with saying, reverentially looking towards the intellectual heights to which Lena had

attained, and yet inwardly congratulating herself on her own pleasant pasture lands and bucolic shepherd. Her sister, whose views were rather ecclesiastical than theological, and who thought more of the unity of the Church than of orthodoxy in the abstract, had not troubled herself to consider the theories of the *Periodic Review*, having been specially cautioned against the secular tendencies of that publication by the *Church Times*. She was, however, greatly interested, and—as she herself declared—surprised, to hear of the auspicious termination of Mr. Frank Morden's difficulties, having felt some inward doubt as to the capability of so thoughtless a young woman as Mrs. Selfert to act as the adviser of a young man in so delicate a matter.

“Some one ought to warn him against the sinfulness of allowing himself to be mixed up with that sort of person for the future,” she said with energy, thinking of the manifold pitfalls, discernible only by a woman's eye, which

were scattered in the path along which such young men as Frank must tread. Matrimony had never presented peculiar attractions to her eyes, but a life spent in the work of the better angel of a being so peculiarly prone to error was a very different thing, and appeared to her in no way inconsistent with the daily services at St. Agatha's.

The peril in which the wanderer stood was still in her mind when they met Frank at the door, and that young gentleman, whose appetite for society was already returning with fresh vigour in these the early days of his convalescence, offered in the superabundance of his exultation to walk with them as far as the Metropolitan Railway.

"I really don't think my cousin expects me at all to-day," he remarked with ingenuous candour, perhaps feeling that he had shouted his songs of victory often enough in her ear already.

Both the ladies, who knew nothing of the struggle from which he had emerged trium-

phant except that there had been an unknown and dreadful woman concerned in it, felt some pardonable curiosity as to the details of his experiences, and were willing enough to offer their ears in substitution for that which he had already tired out.

"I think those underground stations are the most dreadful places for ladies ever invented!" said Florry, who had on one occasion essayed to get from Baker Street to South Kensington by herself, and had succeeded in touching at most of the principal metropolitan termini, including Charing Cross and Cannon Street, before she reached her destination.

"It's easy enough if you just look at the map once," said Frank, speaking out of the depths of his experiences of Babylon the great.

"I suppose you've lived in London all your life, haven't you?" said Florry, speaking with all the respect due to a man to whom the mysteries and iniquities of the great city

were familiar. "I almost wonder you and Milly haven't met before."

"One does knock about among such odd people!" said Frank, who felt that he had not as a rule frequented the society in which he and Miss Davidson would have been likely to have been thrown together.

"I almost fancy I remember seeing Mr. Morden once at church," remarked Milly, with an idea that it would be a step towards establishing her benign influence over the misguided young man if she could lead the conversation towards something connected with the Anglican liturgy.

"I don't think so," said Frank, shaking his head doubtfully; "when I'm at home I generally go to my father's church, of course—at Lord's-end, you know. I fancy that's rather out of Miss Davidson's beat."

"There's nothing anywhere like the music we have at St. Agatha's!" said Milly with enthusiasm. "Of course it's dreadfully crowded on Sundays, but I think I enjoy

the week-day services best after all ; don't you, Florry ?”

“It's not like the rest you feel on Sunday morning,” answered Florry doubtfully, remembering that they did not find that any week-day services were essential to the welfare at the parishioners of Lydcombe.

“I can't say I find much time for church on week-days,” remarked the reprobate, speaking as if the cares and pleasures of a metropolitan existence were quite enough to engross every minute of a man's time. “There's that place in Taunton Street—my sister Sophy rather puts my father's back up by going in there eight days out of the seven. Of course a girl has so much time that she doesn't know what to do with.”

“I'm sure you might manage to get to the five o'clock service at St. Agatha's sometimes,” said Milly, in a tone of angelic invitation. “It isn't a bit farther out of your way than Wimpole Street.”

Before the Metropolitan Railway was

reached Frank had pledged himself to accompany Miss Davidson to the much-lauded five o'clock service at St. Agatha's on the next day, and Milly already began to regard him as a brand plucked by her own white hands from the burning.

Frank himself felt as if he was about to turn over a new and unsullied page of his existence, and the transit from Lizzie to Milly was quite sudden enough to produce an agreeable sensation of recovered backslidings and frailties abandoned in his mind.

"It'll be an awful rush getting back to Lord's-end in time for dinner at seven," he remarked, conscious of the magnitude of the effort he was about to make, and feeling as a mediæval knight may be supposed to have done when contemplating the introduction of a hair-shirt beneath his coat of mail for the first time next morning.

"Only five and twenty minutes, you know," said Milly encouragingly, "anthem and all. Ever so many gentlemen come in every day

as they go back from the city. I shall be so disappointed if I don't see you."

Frank promised that he would not willingly be the cause of Miss Davidson's feeling any disappointment, and the earnestness of the leave-taking at Baker Street between the votary of St. Agatha and her proselyte was quite impressive.

As Frank made his way back towards the paternal roof at Lord's-end he had already begun to wonder whether the pure light of Milly's eyes might not be destined to become the guiding star on which his own were to be fixed through life, and to think almost with disgust of the coarser charms of Miss Deacle which had once led his senses astray. It was something to know that there were still women who would make an effort to draw him out of the slough of despond!

CHAPTER XI.

THE next meeting between Hurst Atlee and the "wrong-headed ass" who objected to the former sending a letter to his wife, though perhaps not looked forward to with pleasure by either, was not characterised outwardly by any signs of disapproval. However convinced Rothery Selfert might have been that he had been right in calling the "correspondence" both clandestine and injudicious, he was by no means willing that any man should have the satisfaction of boasting that he had inveigled Rothery Selfert's wife into so grave an indiscretion; nor was he ready to degrade himself by making public complaints of the conduct of the woman he had

chosen to share his glory. Besides, he was of course quite ignorant that Atlee knew anything of the conjugal thunderstorm which he had unintentionally caused to break ; while the younger man had the advantage of suspecting, at any rate, what was passing in the other's mind with reference to himself, and had not the shadow of a doubt but that the storm had beaten severely on the "poor little woman's" head. It is to be feared that his pity for the latter was almost entirely merged in an unacknowledged sort of satisfaction at having been able to discover a cloud, rather bigger than a man's hand, on the horizon of Rothery Selfert's hitherto unobscured prosperity.

"I hear you have been interesting yourself on behalf of one of Mrs. Selfert's relations," said Mr. Selfert grandly, determined that the man to whom he was speaking should not be allowed to fancy that there was a secret between Lena and himself of which the husband knew nothing. "There

were reasons why I should not involve myself in his affairs which I need not inflict upon you, but I am much indebted to you for the trouble you have taken in the matter."

"No trouble at all," said Hurst Atlee brusquely, quite understanding the motives with which the other spoke. "As it happened, I was able to pull him out of his difficulties without really doing anything in the matter, and it was a great pleasure to me to be able to oblige Mrs. Selfert so easily."

"Quite so," said Mr. Selfert; "that is what I understood. You must excuse my asking you if you have been put to any expense? Of course that is a matter which would not occur to a lady's mind in the first instance, but Mrs. Selfert particularly wished me to see that such had not been the case."

The selfish pride of the man was detestable in Hurst Atlee's mind, and his face darkened ominously as he listened. He knew perfectly well that no word had passed between Mrs. Selfert and her husband on the matter,

and had indeed himself explained to Lena in his letter that, beyond the twenty pounds which Frank's resources had been able to cover, no outlay had been necessary. He further knew that Frank's pocket had not been allowed to suffer even to this extent, and that Lena had found means to put her cousin in the satisfactory position of one who begins his quarter's allowance when half the time estimated for its expenditure has elapsed, but it was necessary to dissemble to a certain extent, and he forced himself to answer the man civilly.

"I haven't spent a shilling," he said, "unless you count a second-class return-ticket to Westminster. I dare say Mrs. Selfert won't mind being indebted to me to that extent."

Mr. Selfert tried to laugh, but it was not a thing he ever did well, and he was conscious that there was not a genuine ring about his hilarity on this occasion. He did not know the exact nature of the scrape out of which Atlee's experience had so successfully extri-

cated his wife's *protégé*, and felt a strong curiosity to ask all about it; but the humiliation of admitting that he had been allowed to remain in the dark about anything was too much for him, and he allowed the opportunity to pass without being utilised.

"I am sorry to say that Mrs. Selfert won't be able to thank you personally," he said, "as she is going out of town almost immediately."

This was so far true, that he had made up his mind in the course of the last half hour that his wife should be removed for a time from Wimpole Street, but the announcement would have been quite as great a surprise to Lena, had she heard it, as it was to Hurst Atlee.

"I can dispense with any more expressions of gratitude," said Atlee, with a grim smile. "Parliament meets next week, doesn't it? I suppose you'll have to be back by then?"

Mr. Selfert had not yet arranged these details in his own mind, and did not like

being cross-examined upon them by one whom they could not possibly concern.

“I shall, of course, have to be within reach of London,” he replied stiffly, “but further than that I cannot at present say. Are you going down towards Westminster?”

Then the two men had parted, each inwardly congratulating himself that nothing more unpleasant had passed between them; but Hurst Atlee, as he smoked his last solitary pipe that evening, was perhaps a little more inclined to quarrel with the details of Mr. Selfert’s domestic management than he had any reasonable excuse for being.

It has been said that Hurst Atlee had not attained his thirty-first birthday without certain visions of matrimonial happiness having been allowed to float before his eyes, and sundry ladies of his acquaintance had long marked him out as one who was sure to succumb sooner or later to a properly organised system of attack.

Mrs. Durham Rogers in particular, who

believed it to be her special mission to sort the rest of the human race together in couples, and had dealt in her time successfully with far more hopeless subjects, was especially anxious to get the young barrister off her hands, and had at different times paraded the most promising entries on her list before him for his inspection. Just now she was unusually sanguine of having found something that would exactly suit the rather varied requirements she had heard him on former occasions express, and only the night before the conversation with Mr. Selfert, which has been just described, he had been asked to dine at her house for the express purpose of developing his acquaintance with the young lady who had been suggested as likely to suit his taste.

It is hardly to be wondered at, therefore, if the image of Miss Madeline Lawrance mingled in his mind, under the influence of the soothing weed, with his captious criticisms on Rothery Selfert's mode of adjusting

his conjugal relations, and if his opinions on neither subject were absolutely settled when he knocked the ashes out of his pipe.

Miss Madeline Lawrance had certain advantages which were undeniable, and if there had not been drawbacks as palpable attached to their appropriation, it is probable that it would not have been left to Mrs. Durham Rogers to undertake the task of disposing of the lot. Nobody had ever seen her father, but it was understood that he was either an engineer or contractor whose business lay chiefly in Russia and Turkey, and Mrs. Durham Rogers spoke with great confidence of the benefits which were to accrue to his daughter from such continental undertakings. Her mother was even more unobtrusive, having contracted a habit—probably during Mr. Lawrance's periods of absence in Russia—of going to bed at five o'clock every afternoon, and rising at the same hour in the morning ; so that the greater part of her conscious existence was passed when the world was, for

all practical purposes, as empty as possible of her fellow-creatures.

The young lady herself, if not "better than pretty"—a delicate synonym for positive plainness in the minds of conscientious optimists of the best class—was certainly not possessed of the attractions which Hurst Atlee in his younger days had deemed indispensable, but then she had a great deal of style, and by always getting her dresses made at Paris by an artiste who understood her angles, had acquired the reputation of possessing a good figure.

Her complexion was naturally "washy," but susceptible of improvement, and though it was difficult to quarrel with her teeth individually, their serried front did not succeed in leaving an agreeable impression upon the eye. The nose was by no means too pronounced an aquiline for some tastes, and though it is difficult to arrive at a safe conclusion as to the amount of hair of which a lady can justifiably boast, Miss Lawrance had

apparently a more than respectable show, of a fluffy and uncontrollable growth, for which she had no cause to blush. Her eyes were quite her strong point, and had it not been that her mouth was rather too large, with lips that had a vague tendency to lose their colour about the edges, Miss Lawrance might fairly have claimed to be called quite a good-looking girl.

There was nothing within, as far as Hurst Atlee knew, unworthy of so fair an exterior, and he had heard no word from her lips which had led him to doubt that the encomiums of Mrs. Durham Rogers on her moral and intellectual qualities were deserved.

Nevertheless, he could hardly as yet fancy himself willing to accept Miss Madeline Lawrance at the altar from the hands of the continental contractor, even if Mrs. Durham Rogers guaranteed the reality and durability of her charms.

"I shall have to congratulate you very soon, I know, Maddy," Mrs. Durham Rogers

had said to her friend at the close of the evening.

Maddy shook her head, being conscious that a certain irregularity of feature impaired the effect of her charms, and not feeling sanguine as to her entire adaptability to Hurst Atlee's needs even in other respects.

"He'd have married long ago," continued Mrs. Rogers, "if he hadn't been encumbered in some way. I happen to know that personally."

Mrs. Rogers, who had not been always Mrs. Rogers, here infused a certain tender regret into her voice, to indicate the special opportunities she had enjoyed of discerning Mr. Atlee's aspirations. "He has to pay an annuity to some poor relations of his, I believe, and it's just made the difference to him all his life."

"Is that all?" said Maddy, with a feeling of relief, knowing that there were encumbrances and encumbrances.

"You'd be a very lucky girl," continued

the elder lady, "for I think he's about the best-looking man I ever knew."

Madeline smiled faintly in assent, feeling that for that very reason the profits of Russian railways would be inadequate to draw the subject of their conversation to her faithful breast. Nevertheless it is evident that Hurst Atlee's personal advantages would not have been discussed in this way between the ladies, had he not given them some reason to believe that the question of disposing of them to the best advantage had passed before his mind.

Mrs. Durham Rogers was indeed right in supposing that the necessity of some sort of matrimony was beginning to force itself rather positively upon Mr. Atlee's attention. He was absolutely sick of his present mode of existence, and quite ready to entertain the belief that any change, which promised to diminish the discomforts that a poor man is obliged to accept, would be for the better. As to the ideas of domestic happiness with

which Rothery Selfert had made his maturer choice, Hurst Atlee had long ago ceased to indulge in any very sanguine aspirations in that direction, and had accepted in substitution such little gratifications as he had found in his path with philosophic indifference to the want of savour he had found therein. He knew, however, that these were not likely to improve, either in quantity or quality as he grew older, and was equally sensible of the advantages to be enjoyed from the command of an income which should make his half-yearly remittances to the Misses Armitage no longer a perceptible burden. Knowing all this, he was quite ready to inspect the temptations which such as Mrs. Durham Rogers provided for his choice, and felt that if he could make up his mind to Miss Lawrance's teeth and complexion, it would not be at all a bad thing for him to sacrifice the liberty of which he had hitherto made such unsatisfactory use. It was unfortunate that just at the moment

when he realised this most completely, there should cross his mind the image of Lena Selfert's pleading eyes and graceful petitioning smile, and that he should begin to wonder whether, if he had started under such promising auspices as Rothery Selfert had done, he would have managed to make such a mess of his materials for domestic bliss. What an abominable brute the man must be, he thought, to be unable to retain the affection and the respect of a woman so made to give herself wholly to some man, as every mute expressive change of his wife's face told that she was! It was not only that she was pretty—in fact, comparing her mentally with the Nelly of other days, he could not help remembering that Nelly's cheek was more like the sunny side of a peach, and Nelly's form rounded into more graceful curves than Mrs. Selfert could ever have boasted—but there was a vague and intangible charm, as real as a perfume, about the latter's manner, which left no doubt in his mind that she

would have brought happiness to the hearts of nine men out of ten, and certainly to his. Then there came a doubt into his heart of the sufficiency of Miss Lawrance's more material attractions to do as much, and he swallowed his whiskey and water in a hurry as if to take a disagreeable taste out of his mouth.

"Pshaw!" said Hurst Atlee to himself, putting his pipe and his thoughts away for the night. "One woman's as good as another, I suppose, if a man can't get the one he wants—better, if you come to that! I wonder what on earth women marry at all for, when they've got enough to please themselves for the rest of their lives, without bothering about anybody else. I suppose it's a providential arrangement for those who have nothing but such an instinct to look to for support!"

With which philosophical reflection Mr. Atlee sought the repose which had been prepared for him by his laundress; but it

may be safely asserted that, if any female phantom mingled with his dreams, it was not one bearing the likeness of Miss Madeline Lawrance.

CHAPTER XII.

IT will be remembered that Rothery Selfert had informed the man, at whose correspondence with his wife he had been so indignant, that Mrs. Selfert's arrangements would take her almost immediately out of town; and it was not to be supposed that a deliberate decision arrived at by a husband in such a matter was to be lightly set aside.

Since Lena had told Mr. Selfert—with a proud sense that she had in a measure been humiliated by marrying a man inferior to herself—that she thought he had been “unreasonable,” the division already existing between them had widened almost into an estrangement, and she had been left to reflect

on the want of reason he had exhibited without being compelled to endure any further manifestation of his deficiency. Nor can it be said that the leisure thus afforded her had done anything towards convincing her mind of the equity and discretion which her husband was persuaded had characterised his conduct throughout. He had waited in vain for some sign, however slight, of conjugal penitence—some intimation that she was prepared to accept the impress of his mind on her own without shrinking from the contact—and his brow darkened every day as he saw that no such satisfaction would be afforded him. Nevertheless he was resolved that he would not shrink from the task of properly educating the unruly and ill-disciplined mind which so deceptive an exterior had concealed at first from his discerning gaze. A woman might be unable to distinguish clearly between right and wrong, but a wife, in his view, could never be allowed to remain in the belief that she was at liberty to

follow her own mistaken judgment. It was necessary, no less for the proper development of her own moral being than for the ultimate attainment of that domestic happiness on which he had set his mind—and which seemed so persistently to elude his grasp—that she should be taught those elementary principles of a wife's duty, which render it incumbent on her to accept with cheerfulness the matured judgment of her husband's mind before she can demand to know anything of the mental processes by which they are reached. As to the consequences which would follow, should she refuse to acknowledge such a duty, he did not allow himself at present to entertain any speculations.

“I do not understand what objections you can possibly have to Markby—a place you have never even seen,” he said, in a tone almost querulous at the discovery that his wife, even in her disgrace, was not willing to yield an unreasoning obedience to the expression of his wishes.

Now Markby was a village in Shropshire where an aged aunt of Mr. Selfert's lived in charge of a dreary patrimonial estate, and it was the Markby solitudes that had been in Mr. Selfert's mind when he spoke to Hurst Atlee of Mrs. Selfert's intention to leave town.

"Nor do I understand what reason you have for wishing me to go there," said Lena, whose indignation at the treatment to which it was proposed to subject her was teaching her to overcome the mysterious awe of her husband's wisdom with which she had started to walk hand-in-hand with him through life. "It is exactly because I know nothing of the place or the people that I dislike the idea of going there alone."

"I have already explained that I think it better for various reasons that you should leave town, and I know no other place so suitable. I shall be much engaged at the House during the next month, and Dr. Drake agrees with me that it would be

imprudent for you to remain in London throughout the cold winds."

"That is nonsense," said Lena, who looked with aversion upon Dr. Drake and all his works. "You forget that I have lived in London almost all my life, and nothing of the sort has been thought necessary before."

Such words as "nonsense" were, in Rothery Selfert's opinion, unbecoming on a woman's lips, and still more unbecoming when the woman was his wife.

"You must allow others to judge of that," he answered coldly.

"If you have any better suggestion to make I shall be glad to listen to it, but some arrangement must be made for your leaving town in the course of next week. Mrs. Duprez will be delighted to receive you at Markby, and I can imagine nothing more suitable."

No more was said at that time, and Lena felt as if she was beating her hands against a

rock, so completely was she in the power of this man, who did not even allow her to understand his commands. She had not expected that commands would be addressed to her at all—a bride of only a few months—but it would have been almost a pleasure to her, nevertheless, to have obeyed any that were intelligible. As it was, she had the double humiliation of feeling that she was looked upon not only as bound to obey, but also as incapable of reasoning comprehension; and, while expected to yield the submission of a wife, she had not even the satisfaction of feeling that she was respected as a woman. She had already ceased to think much of that assimilation with her husband which had appeared so excellent a thing in her eyes during those few brief weeks at Ilfracombe, and was growing every day less anxious to share the secrets of a mind which was in all its characteristics so repugnant to her own. The grandeur and dignity which had appeared to her like a halo around

Rothery Selfert's head, when he first asked her to surrender her liberty to his care, were fast fading away; but she could still have loved the man, after a different fashion, if he had been content with affection, and not demanded servility.

Nevertheless, she still opposed a passive resistance to his declared design of sending her as an exile to Markby, and her husband began to perceive that it would be almost necessary to make some compromise with her obstinacy, if he was to preserve the lustre of his authority untarnished by an open battle to support it.

"If there is any place which you would really prefer to Markby, and to which it is not unseemly that you should go alone, I do not wish to compel you against your will."

This was said the next evening, after they had sat for nearly an hour with an ominous cloud of silence between them in the splendour of the bride's newly-decorated drawing-room, trying to enjoy the savour of that

domestic happiness which had been so ardently desired by both.

"I cannot bear the thought of going amongst perfect strangers," said Lena, almost in tears, and scarcely appreciating the concession conveyed by her husband's words for the hard, unsympathetic tone in which they were uttered. "I am sure Mrs. Duprez would be very kind, but I should be miserable there if I went."

"It almost appears as if you were determined to make yourself miserable anywhere," said her husband, bitterly; "but I will consent, if I possibly can, to any particular way you may fancy of doing so."

Lena, to whom the delights of the preceding summer at Lydcombe were already invested with the haze of distant beauty which so soon throws its enchantment over that part of life's road which lies behind us, had once or twice conceived the idea that it might be possible to go back with Florry for a month to Devonshire, but had not yet had

the courage to suggest such a compromise to her husband.

“ I don’t think any place suits me so well as the south of England,” she now said, timidly, feeling that if she let the present opportunity pass, it would be almost impossible for her to offer any further resistance to her master’s will. “ The Carfaxes are anxious to know when I can pay them another visit, and I might perhaps go there now. Of course I would much rather stay in London.”

“ I thought you understood me to say that that was out of the question,” said Mr. Selfert, frowning. “ It would be much more becoming, in my opinion, that you should visit your husband’s relations ; but if you are determined to place your own wishes and your own friends before mine, I will not attempt to control your actions. I do not know any plan you could have proposed which would have been more distasteful to me.”

He had, however, as a matter of fact, no

especial motive for wishing to consign his wife to the care of Mrs. Duprez, and only desired that she should understand, without the disgrace of having it expressed, something of the reason for which she was to be exiled from Wimpole Street.

As to the suggested visit to Lydcombe, it was almost a relief to him when Lena proposed it, feeling, as he did, that he should not otherwise be able to carry out the punishment upon which he had decided, without a positive appearance of brutality.

Clergymen like the Rev. Albert Carfax were in his eyes inoffensive types of a lower order of humanity, but necessarily men of decent life and conversation, at whose houses it need not excite wonder that even the wife of such a man as Rothery Selfert should be received as a visitor. Though his eyes were so swollen with his own fatness, he was able to perceive how wide was the interval between the intellectual powers of Mrs. Carfax and those of his own wife, and did

not believe it possible that the latter would condescend to accept any encouragement or incentive to her rebellion against the sacredness of his authority from such an adviser. Nevertheless, it was not his policy to assent readily to Lena's proposal, taking credit to himself—with an empty arrogant assumption of virtue which almost amounted to self-deception—for the thoughtful consideration for her happiness which led him to postpone his own wishes in the matter altogether.

The Carfaxes were going back to Lydcombe on Saturday, and it was Wednesday when Mr. Selfert consented that Lena should accompany them; so that there was not much time for any one to protest against the exercise of marital authority which was chasing her out of town.

Frank Morden, however, heard of it, of course, and it was not long before he confided his indignation and astonishment to Hurst Atlee's ears—being as ignorant as a

baby that Lena would not have been expelled from Wimpole Street, had it not been for her effective way of dealing with his own disreputable troubles, and the assistance which the man to whom he was speaking had afforded her.

"I think it's about as disgraceful a thing as I ever heard of," said Frank, who felt that he might fearlessly assume his cousin's championship before an outsider like Atlee. "They've not been married six months, and she can't stay in the house with him! I shouldn't be surprised if he were to take to kicking her before he's finished."

"Hardly, that I fancy," said Atlee; "but he's an obstinate man, no doubt. I should think she'd got a will of her own too. What made her marry him, to begin with, do you know? Money?"

"Oh no," answered Frank, who knew his cousin too well to believe that his own rejection had been due to any such motive. "How on earth can a fellow say what a

woman goes mad for ? It was pretty nearly that, you know. She might have had half-a-dozen men—not so much money, perhaps, but good for as much as she wanted—and directly that fellow came down, she wouldn't say another word to one of them. *I knew a man myself——*”

How far Frank's autobiographical sketches of the inducements *not* to marry Mr. Selfert which ought to have governed his cousin's mind would have extended, it is impossible to say. Certainly the fancy sketch he was about to draw of himself might have been amusing, but Hurst Atlee nipped the tendency to reminiscence in the bud. Except so far as the infantile prattlings to which he was compelled to listen might throw light upon the history and character of Lena Morden, he regarded the young man's presence in his chambers as an unmitigated nuisance.

“I have no doubt she had her own reasons for marrying, at any rate,” he said abruptly.

“As a matter of course, she had other chances, but you and I can hardly expect to make out why they didn’t suit her book. Unless—perhaps it’s rather a personal remark—but I mean unless you were an *aspirant* yourself in those days?”

There was an assumption of good-fellowship about his companion’s way of putting the thing, which rendered it impossible for Frank, remembering the obligation he was under to the speaker, to take offence at the suggestion. Nevertheless, he flushed even a deeper red than he had ever done for Miss Deacle, as he answered, trying to imitate the other’s light tone,

“Well, we were boy and girl together, you know” (oh, Frank! was your boyhood so entirely a thing of the past?); “and of course we were a good deal thrown into each other’s society. I don’t think any man could tell you more of her past life than I could.” He forgot altogether that there was no special reason why Mrs. Selfert’s past life should be

particularly interesting to Mr. Atlee, except as a student of human nature. "You know, I dare say, that she wasn't very happy at home, after her father made a fool of himself by marrying that woman. Then this fellow came down, you know"—Frank rather enjoyed speaking of his successful rival as "this fellow"—"and I suppose she was dazzled by what he could offer her. Lena was always an ambitious girl—lots of imagination, you know—just the kind of woman a fellow can't understand."

There was a peculiar expression in the listener's eyes—hardly of amusement, certainly of interest.

"I suppose all that means that you think she was in love with him, after all, doesn't it?"

"*In love!*" said Frank, with the profound contempt of one who had sounded all the depths of the mysterious passion. "How could she be in love with a fellow like that? You're a man of the world, Atlee, I know, and I don't mind speaking frankly to you.

How the dickens could a girl like that be in *love* with a man she only knew three or four weeks before she married him? I don't believe she knows what love is, now."

"Well, I don't suppose she does," said Atlee, with a dash of irony in his tone; "not what it means to men like you and me, at any rate. Who are the people she's gone down to stay with in Devonshire?"

"They're well enough," answered Frank. "He's got a small living down there, at Lydcombe, you know"—Frank had a way of assuming that the people to whom he was talking knew everything; "and Mrs. Carfax was an old school-friend of hers. I daresay she'll be comfortable enough down there, and be glad enough to get out of the reach of that man's tongue for a little."

"Lydcombe? Isn't that somewhere near Saltham?" asked Atlee. "I've got an old aunt who lives down in that part of the world."

"Close by—almost the same thing, I fancy.

'Pon my word I must be off now. How do you get on with that fellow? I suppose you see him almost every day, don't you?"

"Pretty well," said Atlee grimly. "We're tolerably civil to each other, as a rule."

"I should like to have a chance of telling him what I think of it all," said Frank. "I did speak pretty plainly to him once—I don't know if you ever heard of that?"

"Not a word," said the other, regretting that he had not been present at the interview, which he thought must have been amusing.

"I'd have broken his head if he'd been a younger man. Any how, I think I gave him as good as I got, and of course there's been a sort of coolness between us ever since. Good-bye, old fellow."

Frank got himself out of Vernon Buildings at last, impressed with the conviction that he had said no more than was judicious—absolutely necessary, in fact, to prevent so long-headed an "old fellow" as Atlee from taking erroneous—perhaps even mischievous—ideas

into his head. His anger against his cousin's husband was genuine enough, though the embers of the passion he had so long allowed himself the luxury of cherishing had pretty well died out. It is remarkable how soon a man's love for a woman who has rejected him gives place to a simple feeling of dislike towards the occupier of the place he coveted so dearly for himself.

Such, certainly, had been Frank's love, and such was its legitimate conclusion. That he was a better or a happier man for the disappointment he had undergone, may perhaps be doubted. Whether or not he was a better or happier man for the experience of Miss Deacle's society which he had purchased so cheaply, admits of no doubt at all. But, taking the disappointment and the experience together, he was certainly at this particular time a happier man than Hurst Atlee, to whom he looked up notwithstanding with almost reverential envy and admiration.

Hurst Atlee, when he was left alone in his chambers, pushed away the papers which had been lying before him, and gave up the pretence of work for that afternoon. The happiness of Lena Morden was no concern of his he told himself a hundred times over; and ill-assorted as her marriage had been, he had seen husbands and wives without a thought in common often enough to have beheld this particular instance without any particular wonder. He knew he hated Rothery Selfert, and rather respected himself for doing so, but surely that was no reason why he should take an especial interest in Rothery Selfert's wife! Rothery Selfert probably hated him too in his own way; but he could not imagine Mr. Selfert gratifying such hatred by taking an interest in his, or anybody else's wife. He was almost amused at the prospect of his ever possessing a wife available for such an experiment at all, so far did the prospect seem from him on this particular afternoon.

It is to be feared that he felt unusually disposed to quarrel with Miss Madeline Lawrence's teeth when he shook the dust of Vernon Buildings off his feet for the day. As for his cousins, Gwendoline and Georgiana, he had by this time learned to regard them almost with loathing. The belief that all women were such as they would alone have consoled him for the deprivation of that domestic happiness which their existence had certainly helped to make more difficult of attainment.

Hurst Atlee thought over these things till he had convinced himself that he was hipped and out of condition from over work, and made up his mind that he wanted a holiday.

CHAPTER XIII.

DEVONSHIRE lanes and Devonshire cliffs, pleasant enough when the long summer days and sweet still nights have robed them in fragrance and colour, are none the less able to delude the senses when the angry south-west wind has laid them waste and bare, and lingers still triumphant, as if exalting at having been privileged to violate so much beauty. There is a strange charm in the earth's bosom when chill and numb, yet still great nature's living breast; in the fretful impotence of the sea, that will so soon wear again its thousand smiles as though its face had never been convulsed with rage. It is even sweet to wander over the cold,

dank grass, and remember that in a few months it will again become a soft warm couch on which to lie and laugh at the noon-day sun. Perhaps it is all the sweeter when our own eyes have been wet awhile with tears, and we can cheat ourselves again into the belief that summer will yet return to us, as to all other of kind Nature's offspring.

It was not like Lena's former visit to Lydcombe, when the air had been heavy with the perfume of honeysuckle and clematis, and the thickets had not yet begun to quiver in the first chill breath of the waning year. The winding lane that led to the cliff walk was cold and scentless now, and the little coastguard station, that had smiled so brightly upon the friendly sea, stood chill and shivering in the driving mists and spray, that the cold March winds hurled against the crumbling rocks on which it stood.

Yet it was something to remember the sunshine which had for the time fled away, and to wander, when the grey clouds parted

for a while, over the well-known spots where she had laughed in the very face of nature, before the last page in her life had been turned, and when she was Lena Morden still. She even took comfort in the remembrance how little she had dreamed of the change which had come over her life, believing it possible, at times, that she was still young enough for the sun to lighten it again with something of the old brightness.

She had been at Lydcombe for a week now, and had only received one curt line from her husband, which had been rendered almost necessary by some delay which had occurred in sending her luggage after her.

Florry had begun to understand, of course, that there was something uncomfortable in the relations between Mr. Selfert and his wife, without which this second visit of the latter to the Parsonage at Lydcombe would hardly have been paid; and what Florry began to understand, the Rev. Albert Carfax understood too, as a matter of course.

Nevertheless, they both forebore from worrying her with questions as to the unexpected acceptance of their invitation, or the probable duration of her visit, and let her wander in and out of the house, and among the dripping lanes, whenever she showed that she was anxious to be left alone with her own thoughts.

"She gets no letters, do you know, Bertie?" said Mrs. Carfax, almost with awe, to her husband, when Lena had gone out alone after lunch on the second Monday after her arrival. "It must be dreadful to have one's husband's time so taken up that he can't write to you when you're away."

Mr. Carfax, who was warming himself before the fire as a preliminary to the parish work to which he was accustomed to devote himself on Monday afternoons, walked to the window to obtain a glimpse of Lena's retreating form before he answered.

"I think there's something wrong there, my dear; I do indeed. He's time enough to

eat his dinner every day, I haven't any doubt."

"What do you mean by wrong?" said Florry in a whisper.

The thing was so terrible to her that it seemed almost as shameful to speak of it behind Lena's back as it would have been in her presence; and she could not understand how her husband could allude to it almost as if it had been an ordinary parish trouble. Had he been talking about little Johnny Yeo's convulsions he could hardly have spoken in a more unconcerned tone.

"The long and short of it is," said Mr. Carfax, speaking with the infallibility of a parish priest, "that it wasn't a love match, and I suppose they've found out they don't get on very well together. I dare say they'll settle down comfortably enough by-and-by."

Florry looked up awe-stricken into her husband's face.

"That would be *dreadful*," she said in the same low tone. "I suppose, perhaps, they

never did quite love each other—not in the way that other people do, I mean.”

No doubt Florry was thinking of the entire sympathy which had knit her and her Bertie together when he was still a curate—unprivileged as yet to read the Absolution in the parish church she could see from her bedroom window.

“People get on very well sometimes without very much sentiment,” said the Vicar. “But there was a great disparity in their ages, and I’ve no doubt in their habits as well. It was a most unsuitable match.”

“Anybody can see she’s very unhappy, at any rate,” said Mrs. Carfax almost in tears; “and I don’t know what to say to her when we’re alone. She never did like letting anybody see what she was thinking of.”

“There’s a man coming up the garden-path,” said the Vicar, shrinking back from the window. “If I don’t slip out by the other door I may be kept here all the afternoon.”

The moment for such an escape had, how-

ever, already passed by ; and Mr. Carfax was compelled to remain an unwilling auditor of the colloquy between the visitor and the housemaid, who had been transplanted by Florry's energy from the Sunday-school. Then the door shut, and the intruder swaggered prominently down the garden-path again, as if to intimate to all the world that the object of his presence in Lydcombe was one admirable in itself and in the means which led towards it.

The Vicar looked at his wife with a smile meant to signify approval of his own judgment, when Mr. Hurst Atlee's card was brought in for Mrs. Selfert. Neither of them had ever heard of Atlee's name before, but both assumed, almost as a matter of course, that he had come on some sort of mission from her husband. It must be remembered that Mr. Carfax's experience of the worldly course of matrimony was not large, and he had a vague sort of idea that a man in Mr. Selfert's position would be

likely to send a lawyer to his wife on the slightest possible provocation. He was not even sure that a Queen's Counsel would not convey certain manifestations of affection through a third party.

"It's very unfortunate that she should be out," said Florry, reflectively. "If he had only come in we might have sent the boy to look for her. She's almost sure to have gone round by the cliff."

"If you please, ma'am, I said so to the gentleman," observed the Sunday-school exportation, who had indeed manifested her extreme intelligence by gratifying Hurst Atlee with that information.

"It can't be helped, at any rate," said the Vicar. "I suppose her husband doesn't expect that we should keep her shut up, on the chance of his sending for her."

Meanwhile Hurst Atlee, guided by the intelligent housemaid, was making his way round by the cliff-walk, where he had been told that Mrs. Selfert would probably be

found. It was not without a certain struggle with his conscience that he had come down to Lydcombe at all, even after he had decided that change of air and scene was necessary to overcome the depression under which he was suffering; but having once made up his mind to this, he was not going to allow any petty obstacles to stand in his way, and would have undertaken a walking-tour round the Devonshire coast, had it been necessary for the accomplishment of his purpose. Such a demand upon his energies was not, however, made, as he came upon Lena, making her way slowly up the steepest part of the cliff, before he had gone three-quarters of a mile from the Lydcombe vicarage.

She started at first when she saw him, having never been told anything of the aunt at Saltham, whose existence Atlee had asserted in conversation with her cousin Frank. And though she was not a vain woman, or one given to imagining that those with whom she was brought in contact thought even as

much of her as was really the case, she felt instinctively that Hurst Atlee would not be exploring the Devonshire cliffs in March had she remained in Wimpole Street. She knew there was no reason why she should be ashamed of meeting him, or hesitate before giving him her hand, either in Middlesex or in Devonshire. And yet, remembering her husband's wrath at the mere fact of her receiving a business-note from this man, she did feel some shame, and she did hesitate.

"I suppose I was about the last person in the world you expected to meet here, Mrs. Selfert," said Atlee, who saw the hesitation, and guessed at the other feeling.

"To say the truth, Mr. Atlee, I did not expect to meet anybody at all," answered Lena, making an effort to speak naturally. "I can't imagine a better place, if one wants to be alone."

"I should have said 'a worse place, if one wants to meet one's friends,'" said Atlee, laughing. "One is a polite form of ex-

pression, the other at least questionable, and they both mean the same thing. I have just left a card for you, and they told me at the Vicarage I should probably find you here."

"You have not come with any—any bad news?" asked Lena quickly, with a sudden vague idea that even the desolation of widowhood might be endured, for the sake of the liberty it would restore. Yet she turned pale as she asked the question, and Atlee was puzzled by her tone.

"I have not come with any news at all, I assure you," he answered lightly. "I am staying at Saltham for a week, and knowing you were here, I thought you would not mind my coming over. The fact is, I never feel as if I knew anybody, until I have seen them out of London, and with all their war-paint off; and finding myself so near to you, I could not resist the temptation of coming to see what you were like under such circumstances."

There was a laugh in his tone, and a light

in his eye, as he talked, which took every shade of disrespect out of his words, and made Lena involuntarily look up with an idea that the grey sky was growing lighter and warmer. It was surely worse than absurd—wicked, in fact—she thought, to imagine that there could be any reason which should forbid her enjoying this man's society, or the society of any other man who was received as a gentleman in her own house! She did not profess to understand the thoughts of her husband's heart in such matters, and though she knew that his anger against her would have been multiplied ten-fold had he seen her at that moment walking by Hurst Atlee's side, she did not consider that she owed a blind disobedience to the unexpressed wish of a husband who had shown himself so unable to understand her actions.

Lena Selfert and Hurst Atlee walked for nearly two hours that afternoon by the side of the wintry sea, and during all that time, the thought most present to the minds of

both was the remembrance that she was Rothery Selfert's wife. Salutory as that remembrance had been in Wimpole Street, it may be doubted whether it was equally beneficial on Duncombe Head, the flagstaff on which it had been the object of Lena's ambition to reach ever since she first came to Lydcombe, and which was now, with her companion's assistance, triumphantly attained. Far away on the right stretched the red line of coast, giving warmth and beauty to the dull grey cloud of sky and sea which lay before them. On the left the cliffs rose steeper and stronger, and great masses of marl and oolite took the place of the crumbling sandstone which had not strength to pile itself so high. Right beneath them lay the Titanic chaos which the landslip had torn from the earth, and not yet given to the sea, threaded only by a sheep-track here and there, where the short rich turf that had fallen from above still yielded an almost inaccessible pasturage. Another mimic cliff

below, and then the sea itself, with great white gulls perched on the wet glistening boulders that stood up from amidst the angry waves, and long stretches of soft grey sand that gave rest to the eye, wearied with so much strife. On the whole, it is not to be wondered at if neither of the two, who stood looking down from Duncombe Head, thought of Rothery Selfert in quite the same way that they had done in Wimpole Street. The frame of a picture is perhaps unimportant; but can the same be said of the setting of a gem?

There was a wooden seat on the very top of Duncombe Head, close to the flagstaff; and on this, profaned though it was with the initials of a score of former visitors, they sat down for a time to rest after their exertions. The clouds had really dispersed to some extent before the more level rays of the afternoon sun, and there was nothing but a soft moist breath from the western sea to chill their resting-place. In such a scene,

it was perhaps a pity that the thought of Rothery Selfert could not be for a time dismissed.

Even under the oppression, however, which this remembrance caused, they talked very much as a man of thirty-two, and a woman ten years younger, would be likely to do in such a place and amidst such surroundings. Lena was especially anxious that the conversation should not be allowed to flag; and if Hurst Atlee had suddenly proposed following the example of Mr. Roberts the curate on a previous occasion, that she might watch him throw stones at the gulls beneath them, it would have been more likely than anything else to have set her at her ease. She would have been quite sure then that there was nothing in the fact of his companionship which need render her uncomfortable; but Hurst Atlee did not seem disposed to give her this assurance. There was more constraint now in his manner than hers, and his attempted assumption of gaiety did not

seem that of a happy, or even a contented man.

"It sounds almost absurd to say I'd rather spend my life in a place like this than in town," he said with a short laugh, after a few moments' silence. "I suppose some absurdities are true, though, and that's one."

"It doesn't sound absurd at all to me," said Lena, to whom it was beginning to appear the most natural thing in the world that her companion should do what so few men do willingly—talk of his own feelings and aspirations. "Only you'd probably have regretted it by this time had you lived here for the last ten years. I often think that even a life like that of Mr. Carfax must grow very monotonous."

"It appears to me that whatever a man does with himself at starting, he's sure to regret it before ten years are over," remarked Atlee bitterly. "I know a few men who *ought* to be contented, but I don't know any who really *are* so. They all think they've

gone wrong, and most of them have really done it."

Lena, who knew little or nothing of the various ways in which a man might go wrong, said nothing, wondering inwardly how large a proportion of the world felt as miserable as she had been doing for the past few weeks, and what reason her companion could have for reckoning himself among the number. Jealously as she tried to guard the secret of her own unhappiness, she could not see that there was any harm in encouraging him to speak of himself; and it was almost a consolation to her to find that there were other human beings besides herself who had bungled their lives at starting. Hurst Atlee had perhaps enjoyed some experience of woman's love, but none of woman's sympathy; and looking into his listener's large grey eyes, he found a strange fascination in speaking to her of the disappointments and obstacles which had turned his hope into a restless impotent envy of other men's happi-

ness. Of his professional struggles, and of his cousins the Armitage girls, he said a few words ; and Lena even heard something of pretty Nelly Ratcliff, who had gone out to swell the Canadian population. She did not quite understand the tone in which Atlee spoke of her, and wondered whether a man always learned to think of his first love as so entirely contemptible a thing, when the richer maturity of wisdom was attained. It was a strange sensation to her, to sit there with the salt breeze ruffling the smoothness of her hair, and listen to the personal confidences of a man she had hardly known by sight three months before. Something of this intimacy, refined and sweetened by her own complete surrender to it, she had hoped that time might have taught her to share with her husband ; but the hope had been only the hope of a dream, and had not lived a moment after her awakening.

“Perhaps you might not have been happier, even if you had married her,” she said

with some degree of embarrassment, seeing that her companion expected her to pronounce some sort of opinion on the effect Nelly's desertion had exerted over his life. Though he did not speak as if the effect had been very great, she could not help feeling that the remark was rather a hazardous one.

"I dare say I should never have wanted anything better—then," he answered bitterly—a tribute to the power of Nelly's fascinations which that young lady would hardly have appreciated. "And I have never had anything better, at any rate, since."

"It must be something for you to think that you have always done what seemed to you your duty," said Lena gently. "And you have plenty of time for happiness before you still, have you not?"

She was thinking, as she spoke, how powerless and contemptible all sorrows seemed which might turn any day into mere common joys, like those of the rest of the world; and

how real the unhappiness seemed—in comparison—of one who had made irrevocable shipwreck of the whole of her life, as she had.

Setting the mere question of freedom aside, what could give her back the wonderful mysterious ignorance, the childlike faith in the humanity of man as in the divinity of God, which she had left at the altar before which she had stood with Rothery Selfert's hand in hers?

"One spoils one's own happiness, in nine cases out of ten," he answered gloomily. "I shall do as others have."

"Surely that can only be by doing something wrong!" said Lena. "And it is not so very hard, I should think, to make up one's mind not to make oneself miserable in that way?"

"You do not know how I have been tempted," said Atlee, looking at her with an undefinable expression in his eyes to which she was not accustomed. "Or how I

am tempted now!" he added in a hoarse voice, that died away almost into a whisper.

Lena was strangely startled, and rose with an instinctive feeling that there was more danger in this man's society than she had first allowed herself to believe.

"It will be growing dark in an hour," she said, trying hard to speak in her most natural voice, "and you must remember I have to go all the way back to the village. I suppose we can get down the same way we got up?"

Atlee followed her without a word, seeing that she was frightened, and yet not in reality regretting the impulse under which he had spoken. It was not the man's nature, in his present frame of mind, to regret anything which he did not believe to be a mistake, and he did not consider, in this instance, that he had made any. The words were ill-chosen, but it had been his deliberate

resolve to utter them, and he would not have taken them back.

The path, which gradually trended downwards, following the tortuous windings of the cliff-face, was a difficult one enough for a lady, and Lena had been ready to avail herself of her companion's assistance when they made their way up it. It was so plain now, however, that she wished to avoid his touch, that it was impossible for Atlee to force his aid upon her, and he was obliged to content himself with following as closely in her steps as the nature of the ground permitted.

He was just beginning to feel anxious at the rashness with which she was ignoring its difficulties, when a mass of the crumbling soil gave way beneath her tread, and he sprang forward with a cry of alarm, just too late to prevent her fall. Twenty feet below the precipice began, but between it and the path was a belt of brushwood and soft wet ground,

into which she rolled, and lay helpless.

He was at her side in a moment, with a horrible feeling that if she had staggered but a few yards farther, nothing could have preserved her from a fearful death, for which he would have been responsible in the sight of God—almost indeed, of man.

“You are not hurt?” he cried passionately, seeing that her eyes were open, with only a strange dull look of stupor and alarm in them. “For God’s sake, say you are not hurt!”

“No, I am not hurt,” said Lena faintly, “except, perhaps, my foot, and I am not sure about my back. It would not be much use my *saying* I was not hurt, would it?” she added, with something even of a smile about her lips, which would certainly not have been there had she completed her descent safely. She made an effort to rise as she spoke, but was obliged to give up the attempt, and sank back again with a little moan of pain on the wet oozing soil.

"I must carry you," he said abruptly, "at any rate, to some place where you can be comfortable until I can get help. Of course, you would rather not," he added quickly, seeing the expression on her face; "but it is absolutely necessary. You needn't be afraid, I am as strong as a horse."

He stooped as he spoke, and disregarding her faint objections, lifted her easily and tenderly in his arms, thrilling all over with the consciousness of her touch. Though she was a light burden for her height, there are few women who can be carried many yards without trying an ordinary man's strength, and big drops were standing on his forehead when he struck the path a little lower down, and placed her on a dry part of the bank in comparative comfort. There had been another cry of pain when he lifted her, but no more, and he was not surprised, when he laid her down, to see that she was quite insensible.

"Poor child!" he said involuntarily, as he

looked at the pale sweet face, from which the little smile had quite died away, leaving in its place an unusually careworn expression for features so young and delicate.

He knew that he could not expect to find assistance very near, and stood irresolute for a moment how to act. Stooping down, he cut with his penknife the boot from her foot, which was already swollen and stiff, and was thankful that her insensibility saved him from having to listen to another moan as he did so. He did not actually fear that she was seriously injured, but a great fountain of pity and tenderness seemed to rise in his heart at the sight of so beautiful and helpless a creature in the relentless grasp of pain, and, bending down again, he kissed the pure parted lips with a wildness of passion against which he made no further attempt to struggle.

"She will never know that mine have left a stain there!" he muttered bitterly, awakening in another moment to the necessity for

immediate action which was pressing upon him.

Just then her eyes opened, with a strange horror in them, and he was on his knees beside her in a second. He had a flask in his pocket, and tried to persuade her to swallow a little of the spirit, but could not overcome her passive resistance.

“The pain will go off directly,” he said, “and you will be all right again after a day or two on the sofa. Only I must leave you here for ten minutes while I find somebody to go to the village. They must bring a litter of some kind for you.”

“Yes—go !” she said, with an energy which surprised him, and he did not dare to waste any more time by her side.

The afternoon was already closing in, and the chance of staying with her till some stray coastguard-man or labourer should pass was not to be thought of for a moment. Lydcombe was nearly three miles off ; but there were isolated farms and cottages in all direc-

tions inland, and he made his way straight across country to the first of these he could see. A quarter of an hour had not elapsed before he was at her side again, and found her, although pale as death, apparently recovering from the first shock.

"I have sent a messenger to the Vicarage," he said cheerfully, "and you must try and wait as patiently as you can for an hour or so. There are some men trying to rig up a kind of litter at the farm, and I dare say they will be here even sooner than that."

"Of course, I can wait twice as long, very well," she answered, in a much more natural voice. "Perhaps I had better take a little of that stuff now, if you can get some water."

The litter came at last, and strong arms with it; but until it arrived hardly another word passed between them. He took off his coat and put it round her, trying with wonderful tenderness to improve her condition as far as possible; but he could not help seeing that even in her suffering she shrank

from his touch as she had never done before. It was almost as great a relief to him as to Lena herself when Florry's loving arms were round her instead of his, and he turned his back upon the Vicarage with a sense of guilt on his heart which four muddy miles of Devonshire lanes did nothing to remove.

CHAPTER XIV.

IF Hurst Atlee could afford to spend his time climbing up Devonshire cliffs in March, the engagements of other barristers were more cumbersome and imperious, and Rothery Selfert, at any rate, had his hands full enough to render it a matter of some difficulty even to cast a thought in that direction. Strictly speaking, it was not so much his business in Westminster Hall which filled his mind as the more important anxieties which were incidental to his Parliamentary labours, and the rewards for those labours which had been dangling before his eyes for the last five years. A man of something under fifty may be pardoned for occasionally forgetting

the whereabouts of his wife when he is deliberating upon the expediency of refusing a *puisne* judgeship on the more distant chance of his being made Solicitor-General.

The eminent lawyer who presided over the Rolls Court had just paid the debt of nature—considerably overdue—and all the court cards in the professional pack were being shuffled by unseen and mysterious fingers. Rothery Selfert certainly thought that the time had come when he might very well be turned up an honour, and waited in some anxiety till the deal should be finished.

Brooking, who knew that his own interests were safe in any event, could hardly conceal his disapproval of an indecision which betrayed his master into some temporary neglect of the providers of guineas and half-crowns.

It need hardly be said that in such a state of affairs the literary interludes with which the great lawyer had indulged his leisure hours had become matters entirely of the past.

The *Periodic Review*, which had for a time grown fat upon the sensation excited by the iniquity of Rothery Selfert's ethical theories, was relapsing again into comparative obscurity, and Mr. Dunkerry Smith was plaintive in his regrets that any one should be willing to throw away so splendid a literary career as the author of "Exagogé" might have secured. It was almost impossible for Mr. Selfert to enter the "Diceum"—to which club he, as well as the editor of the *Periodic*, belonged—without hearing some allusion to his own shortcomings in this respect, and the very sight of Mr. Dunkerry Smith was becoming odious to him. He was even beginning to entertain some misgivings as to the entire wisdom of having committed himself to views so far in advance of the theological wisdom of the age.

The bench of bishops had not fallen beneath his onset, and he already began to regret that he had been rash enough to make

the attack. Nevertheless, he looked to the greater glories of the impending Solicitor-Generalship as a consolation for all the indiscretions in which, during the past year, he had permitted himself to indulge ; and it may almost be doubted whether amongst those indiscretions he did not sometimes mentally include the unsuccessful attempt at securing domestic happiness which had taken him to Ilfracombe in the autumn.

Whether he reckoned it as an indiscretion or not, he had no doubt now that his attempt had failed. During the whole of his career he had been conscious of an ill-defined notion that there was a certain sweetness and happiness in the lives of other men, the depths of which he had not yet tasted, and he had looked vaguely forward to a time when he too should understand what made this world more than tolerable to others. Now he had made the experiment, and it had failed. The fruit had not hung too high for his reach, but after it was

plucked it had become dry and tasteless in his mouth.

Of such enchantment as woman could bestow he believed that he had made trial, and had found that it had no power to charm him. Perhaps, he thought, the fault was not wholly in the woman. It might be that the life he had led had in a measure unfitted him for the enjoyment of that domestic bliss which he had believed it was only necessary to stretch out his hand to secure.

His feeling at such times towards his wife was one rather of disappointment than of anger, and he was inclined to believe that no other woman would have come any nearer giving him the satisfaction he coveted. Nevertheless, he was as sternly resolute as ever in his determination to make the best of the feminine material which had come under his hand, and as convinced that such a task was to be accomplished only by a discipline which should crush all individuality out of it. Just at present it was part of his discipline to

dismiss his wife as much as possible from his thoughts, and let her know of such dismissal.

Husband and wife, however, of six months' standing, cannot escape from certain exigencies of their position by putting a couple of hundred railroad miles between them, and he had no wish to excite scandalous comment by abstaining altogether from communication with the woman he had sent, as if in disgrace, from his hearth.

That it should be thought insufficient on his part to have written to her twice in ten days, he could not have understood ; and had he heard the criticisms on his marital devotion which had already been made in the Lydcombe Parsonage, he would have regarded them as mere impertinent folly, which required no answer.

It gave him no pleasure to receive letters from Lena, which would only have jarred upon his ideas of what was becoming in a woman, even if they had been such as she

would naturally have written to the man whom she had chosen to know intimately alone among all others. As it was, the few constrained lines she thought it necessary to send him offended his taste in another way, and he regarded them as evidence of a sullen and unyielding temperament which it was a necessary misfortune that he should attempt to subdue.

On the particular morning when he received her letter, telling him of her accident, he was especially taken up with his personal anxieties and ambitions, and felt it almost as a personal wrong that any other demand should be made upon his time. She simply said that she had met with a fall, and hurt her ankle badly enough to prevent her from walking for a few days; and perhaps there was nothing in the way she described her accident which need necessarily have excited the alarm even of a much more anxious bridegroom.

There was no mention in it of Hurst

Atlee's share in the matter, or even of his presence at Lydcombe at all—a reticence which was certainly unwise, but perhaps pardonable, considering the effort which it cost Lena to write at all from the bed on which she was laid—and as Mr. Selfert walked down to his chambers after his solitary breakfast, he made another effort to put his matrimonial troubles as completely out of his mind as he had succeeded in removing them from his sight. He had always held that it was absolutely necessary, if a man was to go through his daily work profitably, that his mind should be as free as possible from the anxieties which were probably inseparable from the sometimes unavoidable incumbrance of a home.

Even a barrister's chambers, however, are not entirely exempt from such invasion ; and Mr. Selfert, though he could not very well deny himself to his father-in-law, welcomed the announcement that Mr. Morden was waiting to see him with a very black frown indeed.

Brooking, who remembered the cordiality with which the same visitor had been received on a previous occasion, showed less than his usual discretion in allowing his master's doubly-adopted relative to follow him to the door of the barrister's inner room; and Mr. Selfert could only resolve that on another occasion he would take precautions against such an unwarrantable intrusion. He had no doubt that this man had come to him with some further complaint of Mrs. Morden's misconduct, and it was not to be endured that he should be called upon to answer for "Catherine's" want of adaptability to her home.

Mr. Selfert considered that a man who was unable to manage his own wife was a despicable creature at best, and who became, when he called in others to witness his humiliation, perfectly odious to the rest of his species.

He had certainly married this man's daughter—that was most true, he thought bitterly in the words of Othello—but for her

and her family he considered that he had done enough, and more than enough, already, and he greeted her father with almost a scowl on his brow, determined to show that he recognised no such family privileges as would entitle this man to intrude upon one who might almost call himself the Solicitor-General elect.

"Thank you—that will do," said Mr. Morden, turning round to acknowledge Brooking's courtesy before the door was shut between them, with a servility that almost set the barrister's teeth on edge. "I thought it best to drop in for a moment myself, Mr. Selfert, although I was very nearly sending a note round from the Treasury. Only there was just a word or two I wanted to ask you."

"Just so—just so," said the barrister, in the tone which he was accustomed to employ to re-inspire the mental energies of a dilatory witness. "I can't say my time is exactly my own this morning, but of course you know it

very seldom is at this time of the day. Anything you want me to do for you?"

"It's about Lena, you know," said Mr. Morden, who was very unhappy in the presence of his majestic son-in-law, and by no means spoke in the tone which his relationship would have justified him in using. "I can't help seeing that there's something wrong—although I hope there can't be really—and of course I didn't feel happy at hearing she'd gone all the way down to Devonshire alone. And now she's half killed herself tumbling down a cliff, and upon my word I can't see how matters could very well be going on worse." By which it may be seen that the account Florry had thought it right to give of Lena's troubles had not at any rate been under-coloured.

The attack upon Mr. Selfert's equanimity was so sudden that he hardly knew at first in what direction the man's presumption ought to be rebuked.

"I don't at all understand you," he said.

"As to my wife's stay in Devonshire, I do not see what possible fault can be found with such an arrangement, and I presume she is quite capable of sitting in a railway carriage for five hours by herself. I believe she received no injury from doing so, at any rate."

"That isn't the point at all," answered Mr. Morden, who waxed bolder from the evident fact that his son-in-law was disconcerted. It is as good that your enemy's shield should be weak, as that your own spear should be strong.

"And I am at a loss to know of what you are speaking, when you express your disapproval of the way 'matters are going on.' I had a letter from my wife this morning, in which she mentions that she has sprained her ankle, but I believe, there is no other cause for uneasiness. I do not know from what authority you are speaking, of course."

"That isn't the way it was described to me," said Mr. Morden, with more humility; "but I should be very glad to think it was

so—very glad indeed. It isn't exactly about that I'm uneasy, you know."

"Upon my word you must say more plainly what it is then," said the barrister, who had by this time recovered most of his dignity. "If you like to look in at Wimpole Street this evening, I shall be dining alone, but the Admiralty solicitor is coming in here at eleven."

"I shouldn't exactly like to promise that I would do that," answered Mr. Morden, who was not allowed to disappoint the Kew dinner-table without good reason, and did not care about accepting his son-in-law's hospitality. "Only I wanted to understand what was the matter, you know."

"I really don't understand what you mean, Mr. Morden," said the lawyer, who was getting rather angry. "My wife's down in Devonshire, with very little to do there, and I'm in King's Bench Walk, with a great deal more to do than I can comfortably manage. If there was any information I could give you

it would be a different thing, but I don't see what you want."

Mr. Morden passed his hand nervously through the little hair that his struggles with the world had left him, and felt that this man was too strong for him to deal with.

"I don't think you're treating me quite fairly, Mr. Selfert—I don't indeed. Lena's as good a girl as you'll find in London, I do believe; and it doesn't seem to me the right thing to send messengers down to Devonshire after her. Husband and wife, you know, Mr. Selfert—husband and wife!"

Rothery Selfert did not like being reminded that he knew, or ought to know anything, and the phrase jarred upon him as the phrases of so many men had a way of doing; but he saw that there was really something more for him to learn, and made up his mind to keep the Solicitor to the Admiralty waiting a little longer.

"You are under some mistake, Mr. Mor-

den," he said, in his most frigid tone of superiority. "I send no messengers after my wife, and I do not at all understand why you should think it necessary to insist upon her virtues, which I have never denied. Perhaps you will have the goodness to explain yourself."

Mr. Morden, who had Mrs. Carfax's letter in his pocket, felt too sure of the accuracy of his information to be cowed even by the majesty of a future Solicitor-General.

"At any rate," he said boldly, "I hear that a gentleman called Atlee, has been at Lydcombe, and Mrs. Carfax assumes that he came from you. His visit was certainly to Lena, and I believe, indeed, that she was with him when she met with her accident."

"I had forgotten," said Mr. Selfert slowly. "Atlee? To be sure! You are right, no doubt, and I must apologise for my forgetfulness. You will not think me rude if I ask you to leave me now to dispose of less

interesting matters? My time is not my own, as you are aware, but I will communicate with—with my wife at once."

Mr. Morden, who had made his effort, and felt that he was in some sense victorious, succumbed before the imperative nature of Mr. Selfert's professional engagements, and allowed himself to be consigned to the care of Brooking for exportation out of the sacred precincts.

"You may as well leave that letter you spoke of—from Mrs. Carfax, I mean," the barrister called after him as he got to the door. "I should be glad to see another account of my wife's accident besides her own. My kindest regards to my sister, of course."

Then Brooking shut the unprofitable visitor out of Mr. Selfert's chambers, and the Admiralty solicitor was admitted in his place, nor did the barrister allow his brain to be a whit less keen than its wont while the consultation lasted.

There is no more useful habit for a lawyer than the knack of never permitting his thoughts to wander from the brief he holds for the moment in his hand.

It was not for an hour or two that he was able to push away his papers, and abandon himself to the consciousness of the shame and misery which had, as he believed, come upon him. He did not doubt for an instant that Mr. Morden had spoken the truth, and that his wife had indeed been visited, in the seclusion to which he had righteously consigned her, by the very man whose scandalous impertinence in corresponding with her had sown the first seeds of dissension between them. Further than this he did not dare to allow his thoughts to go, but this of itself in his eyes meant reproach, and reviling, and disgrace.

It was all, no doubt, compatible with innocence, as the world estimates guilt, but it was impossible to him that a woman who had acted with such outrageous defiance of pro-

priety could ever be worthy of the love and honour he had meant to bestow upon her—when she was fitted for it. As for the man himself, who had brought this destruction upon him, his heart was full of loathing and murderous hate.

There was a consciousness in his mind of his own physical inferiority, which seemed to run like fire in his veins, and goaded him so that he began walking up and down his room, with his hands clenched before him, like one struggling to repel an attack of madness. Yet even in the wildness of his passion, his mind was resolved upon one object—the only one which seemed for the moment worthy of an effort. At any cost he must keep up the curtain which still hung between his misery and the gaping eyes of the world.

No one should point at Rothery Selfert as the man who had been made a fool of, in his middle age, by a pretty face and a specious tongue. His wife should still be his wife,

his home still his home, even though he should be driven to abhor both; and such discipline as should be necessary—and practicable—should be carried out without his making one step downward from the pinnacle on which it was his pride to stand in the sight of all men. Not even for the sake of revenging himself would he betray by a murmur the torture which was eating into his heart.

He was obliged to go down to the house that night, and listen with a smile of confident satisfaction to the courteous flatteries and suggestions of congratulation to which fertile rumour had already given birth; but he escaped as soon as possible, learning that there would be no division, and made his arrangements to go down himself to Lydcombe the following day. It was practicable, if he left by an early train, to get there and return to London the same night; and he resolved that, if it was possible for his wife to travel, he would bring her back with him

on the plea of procuring for her better medical attendance in London. So long as she was under the same roof, though her presence might be almost intolerable to him, there could be no danger of her bringing any further disgrace upon his name, and such profane murmurings as those of his father-in-law would at any rate be stilled.

"I have to go out of town to-morrow on urgent business, Brooking," he said to his clerk, who brought some letters from the Temple to Wimpole Street at nine o'clock that night. "You must manage the best way you can, only don't let it get talked about."

"There's a consultation for ten o'clock, sir," said Brooking, who liked to have a voice in the way the barrister disposed of his time. "The papers were on your table all this morning."

"Put them on the fire, if you like," said the Q.C. "They must wait till next week, that's all."

It was very hard to bear, but Brooking saw that no further remonstrance would be allowed, and undertook to deal with Mr. Selfert's clients as his own discretion should prompt him. He felt with something like shame that this was not the first occasion since the *Pall Mall Gazette* and the *Globe* had been sent down to Ilfracombe that something like unprofessional laxity had been allowed to creep into the chambers of which he was the lawful custodian.

CHAPTER XV.

MRS. CARFAX, if she had indeed given Mr. Morden to understand in her letter that Lena was "half-killed" by her fall, had spoken with somewhat unnecessary strength, as the invalid only kept her bed under protest during one day, and managed the next morning to get on to the sofa of the drawing-room.

"You must all fancy I'm made of glass," said Lena, resolutely combating the attempts which were made to control her determination. "There's nothing I hate so much as being coddled."

"I dare say," said Florry, "but I don't intend Mr. Selfert to say we didn't take proper care of you. I have no doubt he will

be very angry, as it is, at your being allowed to tumble down cliffs like this. Fancy the Solicitor-General's wife rolling over Duncombe Head !"

"He isn't Solicitor-General, and I dare say he never will be. But if he had been Lord-Chancellor it would have been all the same, and I don't suppose he would have made a bit more fuss."

"It would have been much more undignified," said Florry. "Of course, if you've made up your mind to get up, you'll have your own way, but you'd much better stay in bed."

Lena did have her own way, and did get up, treating her whole adventure, in the account she gave of it to her friend, as a disagreeable trifle, so that Florry began almost to repent the strength of the language she had used in writing of it to Mr. Morden. It need hardly be said that the idea of Hurst Atlee being in any way an emissary from the lord of Lena's destiny was entirely due to

the intelligent sagacity of the Vicar and his wife, and one which Mrs. Selfert had said nothing either to confirm or to refute. He had of course come over to Lydcombe the next day to inquire after her, but had contented himself with getting his information from the servant, and this time had not even been seen going up and down the garden path. To-day he would certainly come again, and as Lena lay on the sofa in the breakfast-room, she almost shuddered at the fear of having to look into his eyes, and the touch of his hand once more.

There are moments half-way between consciousness and absolute insensibility to the external world, in which the brain is keenly, morbidly, alive, and yet has not had time to resume its sovereignty over the utterance and the muscles which are wont to obey its volition. As Lena lay upon the soft dry bent, with the salt breeze blowing gently into her face, and all the current of her young vigorous life striving to rush back into its

accustomed channels, there had been a magic moment in which a new thrill, unfelt before, had passed over her soul, and left behind it a consciousness of shame and wonderful regret which had not ceased to glow there yet. It was the moment when the passionate lips of the man in whose arms she had just been lying were pressed upon her own, and, like a dash of cold water, it had sent the life-blood surging back to her heart with a great sob of fear. For the moment she felt as if no man's lips had ever touched hers before, not remembering her husband's, except for the horrible shame which made her long to escape somewhere—anywhere out of the reach of both these men, who had stirred the pulses of her being with emotions so different. It was shame, she knew, and misery, she felt, as soon as she was alive again enough to feel anything but that one burning touch. And there had been no thought in her mind from that brief terrible moment, but the prayer of that so shameful a thing might be hidden

from the knowledge of all the world—from her own remembrance, if possible.

Most of all must it be hidden from the man himself. She had wondered feebly as she opened her eyes, and seen his face looking into hers, that he could meet her gaze without shrinking in the consciousness of his wickedness, with hardly a trace in his features of the wave of passion which had just swept over them. Was it possible that what he had done was so light a thing to him, of such common ordinary occurrence, that he could put the thought of it away from him altogether, and smile in her face, believing her to be ignorant of it, as he had done a quarter of an hour before, when they sat together on the little seat that looked over sea and sky from Duncombe Head? She swore to herself that he should never know, never guess that she had been sensible enough, as she lay there, to feel as if he had kissed her very soul. It could be easy, she thought, if she could but live down the shame of the first

few terrible days, to crush the intimacy between them which had grown up so readily and pleasantly, and which had so soon culminated in guilt and disgrace. She knew her husband hated the man who had so outraged the ignorance of her purity, and it would surely be possible so to manage that he should be excluded from the house altogether! It would be better even to meet him sometimes, and strive to treat him so that he would never presume to simulate an infamous friendship for her again, than that he should have any suspicion that she had submitted to the pollution of his caress without denouncing it, even though incapable for the moment of physical resistance. Yet it was all black and terrible, however she looked at the future, and not even the loneliness of her wedded life could prevent her from feeling an almost despairing grief at the discovery that the man in whom she was beginning to trust could behave like a coward and a libertine. Only she felt that death would

be better than that her husband should even know.

"I can't help feeling glad that you were out with Mr. Atlee, and not with Bertie and me, when it happened," said Florry, with pious self-congratulation. "At any rate, Mr. Selfert can't say *we* don't take care of you."

It is to be presumed that Mrs. Carfax had been influenced by other motives than respect for Mr. Selfert's conjugal affection in her efforts to persuade Lena to receive the village surgeon's visit in her own room, but there was no doubt a grateful consciousness in her mind that she was discharging some such duty when she obtained the key of her husband's wine-cellar before he went out for the day in order that Mr. Atlee might not again be sent down the garden-path, when he called, without such acknowledgment of the importance of his presumed object in visiting Lydcombe as the vicarage sherry could afford.

"I hope Mr. Atlee isn't afraid of him, because he's sure to think it was his fault."

"He won't know anything about it, I hope," said Lena; "it's no good bothering men about such trifles."

"Trifles!" said Florry. "You might have rolled right down Ludcombe cliff into the sea!"

"Well, that would have been a trifle," said Lena, trying to joke, "compared to the Solicitor-Generalship. Of course I told him I had hurt my ankle, but I didn't say a word about Duncombe Head."

"Nor about Mr. Atlee?" asked Florry, opening her eyes.

Bertie had perhaps inculcated exaggerated ideas of the sacred obligations of conjugal confidence.

"No, not even about Mr. Atlee," answered Lena, trying to speak unconcernedly, and sternly repressing an almost hysterical tendency to tears. "I am sure I don't know whether he is afraid of Mr. Selfert or not,

but I certainly didn't say a word about its being his fault."

"You always were such a strange girl!" said Florry, looking affectionately at "dear old Lena," and trying to imagine what Bertie's feelings would be if he heard that she had broken some portion of her frame in getting in or out of a Metropolitan Railway carriage, which was the closest analogy to Lena's fall over Duncombe cliff that she could think of at the moment. "I suppose he's sure to come over to-day to see how you're getting on?"

Just at that very moment the gate was heard opening, and Hurst Atlee appeared for the third time making his way up the little path.

"There he is!" said Florry, jumping up. "Of course he'll stay to lunch?"

Lena felt so certain that he would do so that she had not the courage to throw any cold water upon the proposed hospitality, and began for the first time to regret that she had not followed Florry's advice and

remained in bed. It was some consolation to think that he might perhaps be contented by seeing practical proof of her convalescence, and not think it necessary to walk the three miles from Saltham and three miles back on another day before his return to town.

Hurst Atlee apparently had not thought much of the six miles, and seemed to consider his appearance at the Vicarage that morning as much a matter of course as if he was the postman who performed the same daily journey.

"It's worth walking double the distance for, to see Mrs. Selfert so nearly herself again," he protested, in answer to Mrs. Carfax's sympathetic and hospitable demonstrations, such as were due to the ambassador of so great a man as the Solicitor-General elect. "After all, it's only three miles, and I always walk four every morning into the Temple when I'm in town. No, I don't care about any sherry, thank you. I know it's a

popular delusion that a man wants a glass of sherry at every conceivable hour of the day."

Lena felt almost grateful to him for the absolute unconsciousness he exhibited of there being any reason for embarrassment or constraint between them. Wonderful as it was to her, it had a very real effect upon her composure, and even the touch of the man's hand, and the sound of his voice in her ears, were things not so terrible as her excited imagination during the last few days had been picturing them. And when Florry, who did not believe that her own presence was required, and had domestic cares in respect of lunch dragging at her heart-strings, disappeared from the room in which they were sitting, it was almost with absolute *sang froid* that Lena watched Hurst Atlee drop quietly into the vacant seat thus left for him.

If the man who had done this thing could come in and prattle about the iniquity of sherry in the morning and the salutary effects

of his morning walk to the Temple, as she had just heard him do, there could be no necessity, at any rate, that she should show any outward signs of the repugnance his touch had awakened in her.

"No," she said, in answer to his expressions of sympathy, "the doctor says it is nothing very serious."

"I shall never forgive myself, at any rate," said Atlee, "for my stupidity in not being in front. But you were in such a desperate hurry to get to the bottom that you beat me altogether. I ought to have gone first."

"It might have been better," said Lena coldly, wondering if he remembered that it was the words he had used at the top of Duncombe Head, before they began their descent, that had terrified her into rejecting his proffered assistance, with one strong desire in her mind to seek safety by getting as far from him as possible.

For any sign he gave of such remem-

brance, he might have spoken those dangerous words in his sleep.

“Very much better, I should think,” he answered coolly. “I thought for a moment you were going right over into the sea when I saw you fall. That would certainly have been worse.”

Hardly worse, Lena thought, than the picture which was photographed on her brain, of herself lying helpless in his arms, with his impious lips pressed on hers. Hardly worse to have left her life in mid-air, as she had heard that people who fell from a great height were mercifully allowed to do, than to look forward to the endless chain of years that awaited her, solitary and loveless, by Rothery Selfert’s side. Could anything indeed have been better than to have thus cheated the dreariness of fate, and escaped altogether from the inevitable misery of this world, leaving the body whose beauty had proved so useless to her somewhere between the soft soughing sea

and the mighty walls of Duncombe cliff?

"Yes," she answered mechanically; "that would certainly have been worse."

"I must get back to town on Sunday night," said Atlee, "and I should be wretched if I had not been able to see for myself that your recovery is very nearly an accomplished fact. Which foot was it?"

"The right one," said Lena, shrinking with an involuntary idea that he was about to touch it with his hand. He was quite near enough to have done so had he chosen.

"Yes, I remember," he said slowly, and Lena would have given worlds to have prevented the blood from rushing to her cheek, for she was conscious that he was thinking of the moment when she had been in his arms, and trying to recall the attitude in which he had placed her to avoid any pressure on the injured limb.

"I hope you will be on your feet again

next time we meet. You are going back to town soon, I suppose ?”

“I can’t say,” she said shortly, finding it quite impossible to prevent something of what was in her mind from making itself visible in her manner, even if she had wished him to imagine that she was contented to see him assume the friendship they had so nearly cemented as they climbed Duncombe Head together.

“Do I bore you ?” said Atlee. “I am afraid you are too tired to do much talking ; and do you know, although I should have been the loser by it, I almost think it would have been better if you had stayed upstairs another day !”

There was a soft familiarity in his manner which itself almost amounted to a caress, and caused Lena to glow all over with shame.

“My head aches,” she said abruptly, chafing with vexation at the idea of being shut up there with him like a prisoner, unable to leave the sofa on which she lay.

It was the same feeling that had suddenly conquered her out on the cliff, and impelled her to rush down and away from him without thinking of the dangers of the descent, but now she was helpless.

"It seems always to be my misfortune to bring you pain," said Atlee in a lowered voice. "Hard on both of us, is it not? Seriously, is there nothing I can do for you to make amends?"

Lena felt almost as helpless in his hands as during that dreadful moment, the memory of which was burnt into her brain, and could only lie there listening to the scarcely concealed tenderness of his voice, with the conviction growing upon her that it would be impossible often to endure a repetition of such torture. Great as the relief had been of escaping from the gloomy shadow of her husband's presence for a time, she felt now as if there was no safety for her outside it, and that the chance of ever again escaping into the sunshine, which she had dreamed

of for a moment as she watched the clouds parting over Duncombe Head, must be put away from her thoughts for ever. She listened with almost feverish eagerness for the sound of Florry's step, and when at last the discretion of the Vicar's wife allowed her to interrupt the interview for which she had felt it her duty to provide an opportunity, the tears of shame had absolutely forced their way to Lena's eyes. But her head was almost buried in the cushions on which she was lying, and she was spared the humiliation of believing that the man detected how great an effect his presence had upon her.

"You will come in and have some lunch, won't you, Mr. Atlee?" said Florry, glowing with the consciousness of a duty well performed. "Lena, darling, I will send you something to eat in here. You must have been talking too much—you are looking quite done up."

"I think I will try and go to sleep for half an hour," said Lena, striving to speak without

a sob in her voice, and feeling like a captive whose chains are about to be struck from his limbs. Surely her sufferings were over for this day, at least !”

“I won’t bother you more to-day,” said Atlee, with a shade of remorse in his tone as he took her hand in his, and felt that it was icy cold. “Mrs. Carfax must think my selfishness is perfectly brutal.”

She was left alone at last, and buried her aching head in her pillow, with a feeling that the world was a more dreadful place than a year ago she had believed possible. The consciousness of her utter loneliness, and the impossibility of speaking of any of her miseries to a single human being in the world, rushed over her mind like a sudden tempest, and mingled with the recollection of the happy days of her girlhood at Kew, when her heart was satisfied with petting her father, and her cousin Frank’s foolish love the only cloud in the sunshine of her sky. Would it not have been almost better,

she thought, if she had been contented with it, and done something, at any rate, towards making one human being happy? However good it might be for some women to dream of sharing the wisdom and perfection of a king among men, nothing, she felt in her inmost soul, could be more complete than the misery it had wrought for her.

"I am afraid Mrs. Selfert is hardly strong enough to get over such a shock as she has had at once," said Atlee, when he had been at last prevailed upon to make trial of the Vicar's sherry.

"Dear Lena!" said Florry, with effusion, but feeling rather at a loss what further remark to make to her guest.

"It will be a great pity if she is prevented from enjoying the scenery down here," continued Atlee. "I never saw such perfect country in my life."

"I suppose we shan't be allowed to keep her very much longer," observed Mrs. Carfax, thinking it possible that the ambassador

might, at any rate, be tempted to display his credentials. "Of course, she can't move just yet."

"I should say not, certainly," said Atlee, with provoking coolness. "Thanks, I will have a little more pie. Walking over from Lydcombe isn't quite the same thing as going down the Strand, after all."

It proved to be quite as well that Bertie had left the key of his cellar behind him, for Hurst Atlee managed to make a very respectable meal, giving Florry, who had a vague idea that she was doing something to help Lena by her hospitality, every satisfaction that the heart of a hostess could desire. "It's no use asking you to wait to see Mr. Carfax, because he's gone up to Ottery to meet the bishop, and I don't know when we shall see him again."

Hurst Atlee had no particular desire to meet the Vicar of Lydcombe, but it is impossible, when you are drinking a man's sherry, to abstain from expressing the depths

of your regret that you are prevented from doing so in his society, and he assured Mrs. Carfax that he should not be contented to return to London without endeavouring to make up for the deprivation.

"I shall try and come over again to-morrow," he said as he shook hands. "It's my last day down here, but I haven't anything to do, and I shall be glad to see that Mrs. Selfert is really better before I go back to town."

"That will be much more satisfactory, of course," said Florry, not doubting that the tidings of consolation were to go straight to the husband's ears.

Hurst Atlee lit his cigar under the Vicarage porch, and strolled leisurely back to Saltham, taking the path by the cliff, which led right over Duncombe Head, by way of a change, though it added another mile or two to his labours. The spot where Lena had fallen still bore the traces where the treacherous soil had given way, and he stopped to look

at it, going to the very edge of the cliff, and trying to imagine what his feelings would have been if he had seen her helplessly staggering over on to the cold wet sand three hundred feet below. He crawled down on his hands and knees and looked over the giddy height, and then went back and sat down to finish his cigar on the very spot where he had laid her unconscious form, trying to discover its impress in the soft brushwood and tangled grass. It was perhaps a trifle wetter and colder than it had been forty-eight hours before, but a man can hardly be expected to abstain from such rashness from a salutary dread of rheumatism, or to carry a waterproof with him on all occasions. Perhaps it was the chill of the wet sea fog which was creeping up, or it is possible that four miles of London pavements every morning are not the best possible preparation for climbing Duncombe Head after a substantial lunch, but at any rate his steps were not quite so elastic, or his eye so

buoyant when he pitched the end of his cigar into the brushwood, and got up to finish the walk of which he had spoken so lightly in the Vicarage drawing-room. As he passed the little wooden seat by the flagstaff at the summit, his spirits were quite depressed again, and he thought with a shiver that of all the places in the world to spend the night in, that was the most desolate that he had ever seen.

CHAPTER XVI.

ROTHERY SELFERT was at the Waterloo railway station at eight o'clock next morning, and Brooking was left to deal with the consultation of which he had spoken so feelingly in the best manner his experience could suggest. A barrister who has gone circuit for five-and-twenty years is, or ought to be, pretty well accustomed to railway journeys, but this was certainly one of the most unpleasant that Mr. Selfert had ever been compelled to make, and his domestic miseries were almost driven from his mind in the course of it by the thought of the social disruption which would ensue if the Premier should choose this particular day to require

the counsels of a new Solicitor-General. Even if such a communication could be received and answered by telegraph, it was vitally important that immediate steps should be taken with regard to his seat at Packington, for which he would have to offer himself for re-election in the event of the long-desired promotion becoming a reality. The interests involved were of a magnitude too great to be put out of his mind for the misconduct of a woman, even though that woman was his wife, and as Rothery Selfert thought of the missive which might at that very moment be lying unopened at his chambers, he became more inclined than ever to revert to the theory by which his earlier years had been successfully guided, that a man whose ambition it is to climb to the highest rank in his profession shall not encumber himself with domestic felicity at any age.

He had plenty of time to think of all these things, as the morning express hurried him down to Devonshire, past the bleak Wilt-

shire downs and through the soft wet pasture land of the west country, and more than once regretted the hasty impulse which had taken him to Waterloo that morning at all. It was no doubt necessary for his honour—and happiness, of course—that his wife should be brought back to the secure respectability of Wimpole Street, before she had time to dim the lustre of his name by any further indiscretions. But he began to fancy that it would have been sufficient if he had been content to avail himself of the post, or even the telegraph, to attain the desired object without risking the damnation of his worldly prospects by a step so precipitate—and so embarrassing! He knew that he had started on his journey of two hundred miles without any clear idea of what was to be done at the end of it, and was indeed at a loss to account for his unexpected appearance at the Lydcombe Parsonage in any way which would not excite the very suspicions and criticisms he was so anxious to avoid. He confessed

to himself that it was the very insanity of jealousy which had driven him into so injudicious a course of action; and yet, as he thought of Hurst Atlee's smooth, devilish voice whispering in his wife's ear, he knew that he could not have stayed in London for the sake of being made Lord Chancellor.

He remembered that Lena had told him, in the first days of their engagement, after her return from Lydcombe, of their distance from a railway station, but in his present temper, the length of the Devonshire lanes, and the tardiness of the Saltham fly, were additional wrongs, the more unendurable because undeserved.

"You had better wait here," he said gloomily to the driver, when they reached the little inn which Mr. Carfax deemed the bane of Lydcombe society, and he was shown the Vicarage gate hardly a hundred yards further on.

The scheme which he had formed of taking his wife back with him was present, of

course, to his mind as he said this, and he resolved that he would not be thwarted by any such petty obstacle as the difficulty of procuring a conveyance. It was then nearly two o'clock, and he calculated that if they could get to the Saltham station by five, they would be able to reach Waterloo by the eleven o'clock train, and attain the decorous safety of Wimpole Street that night. Then he walked boldly up the little garden path, just as Hurst Atlee had done on the two previous days—to say nothing of that very afternoon.

The servant girl who opened the door to him felt an instinctive prescience of calamity, and took his card to her mistress with almost a scared face. Florry looked at it without understanding the full signification of what had happened, and passed it on to Lena in some bewilderment, looking to her for an explanation.

“The gentleman is in the hall, if you please, ma'am,” said the girl, feeling that

she was called upon to make the matter plainer.

As the door between the drawing-room and the hall was standing open, it was impossible at that moment to discuss the expediency of admitting the visitor, and Mrs. Carfax feeling a good deal frightened, made an effort to welcome the great man.

Lena, who was lying on the sofa, sat up with a pale startled face as she saw the thunder-cloud on her husband's brow, but did not utter a syllable, nor did Mr. Selfert think it necessary to say a word to her until he had formally explained his appearance to the mistress of the house.

"It is, no doubt, a surprise to you to see me here," he said formally, "but I have received what I hope was an exaggerated account of my wife's accident, and was unwilling that she should be left to the care of a provincial surgeon."

"There is nothing the matter with me—nothing at all!" said Lena almost hysteri-

cally, understanding from the tone of her husband's voice that he had some fresh cause for displeasure.

"Nobody could be more attentive than Dr. Perkins," said Mr. Carfax indignantly, "or more clever!"

The remembrance of the skill with which the Saltham practitioner had put to flight an impious rash that had polluted the skin of the hope of the house of Carfax was present to the lady's mind as she spoke, and she felt that it was mere affectation to pretend that the wife even of a Queen's Counsel could require more scientific treatment.

"I have no doubt everything has been done that could have been expected," said Mr. Selfert, looking round as if to survey the whole of Lydcombe and its illimitable resources at once. "Nevertheless it will be far better that Mrs. Selfert should be under the care of our own medical attendant, and I have come down for no other purpose. I thought it best to tell the man

who drove me over not to take the horse out."

Florry looked round in dismay, hardly believing that she fully understood the meaning of the threat which had been held out, and Mr. Carfax, who was standing with his back to the fire, and had been hitherto ignored, gave a low whistle.

"You don't seriously think of getting her up to town to-night?" said the clergyman, coming to his wife's assistance in answer to her signals of distress.

"I do not see the difficulty," said Mr. Selfert frigidly, feeling that he was being treated as if he had made a ridiculous proposal, and determined for that very reason to insist upon it. "The train leaves Saltham at five o'clock, and I believe it is only two miles from here to the station."

"Three," said Hurst Atlee, who was standing by the window, and toward whom Mr. Selfert had carefully avoided directing so much as a look.

As this was the fourth consecutive day on which he had walked the distance, he certainly ought to have been a better authority on the matter than Mr. Selfert, but he did not think fit to add this confirmation to his testimony.

"She can't move off the sofa without being carried," protested Florry, feeling as if Lena had been cast up into the Vicarage out of a sea of troubles, into which the tide was about to sweep her back. "Bertie has to carry her up and downstairs, you know."

It was quite true that the Vicar had rendered this delicate attention to his guest, and Lena had begun to have a horrible feeling that every man she knew had some sort of right to put his arms around her.

"I dare say it can be managed," said Lena desperately, feeling that in Wimpole Street she would at any rate be out of the reach of Hurst Atlee's sight and touch. "Somebody must carry me to the fly, that's all—and I suppose there are lots of porters

who can do that kind of thing at the station."

So long as the arm which encircled her was clothed in corduroy, she felt that it could be endured.

"I hope they won't knock your foot about," said Atlee, offering his little tribute of suggestion, and Mr. Selfert looked round savagely at him, recognising his existence for the first time since he had entered the room.

That such a man should have the audacity to speak of the foot of his—Rothery Selfert's—wife at all was a monstrous thing, but it seemed to him as if the tone used conveyed an additional insult. Almost as if the speaker claimed a sort of joint proprietorship in Mrs. Selfert's feet, or at any rate had been entrusted with the duty of looking after them in default of a more legitimate guardian!

He did not attempt to answer the man's remark, which was, indeed, addressed not to

him, but to his wife, but it hardened him conclusively in his determination to have his own way, though a minute before he had felt inclined to yield in face of the difficulties that were suggested.

"Mrs. Carfax will, I am sure, excuse such an unceremonious departure, and perhaps will be even kind enough to send your luggage after you." He was speaking to his wife, finding it necessary that he should do so, but studiously avoided addressing her by any name, having an idea that he could not do so without making himself ridiculous. "That will not inconvenience you, I suppose?"

"Oh no," answered Lena, with an effort; "it will be better than travelling alone." Her pride urged her to make some pretence at wifely contentment with the will which was so imperiously thrust upon her, but she could not help believing that no one would be deceived by the wretchedness of the imposture. "I shall have plenty of time to pack a travelling-bag or something, if Mr.

Carfax will not mind helping me upstairs again."

Bertie professed his extreme pleasure at being able to be of any service to Mrs. Selfert, but hung back from the suggestion that he should undertake the task single-handed.

"If we could get hold of the gardener," he said, wavering, "we could have you up in five minutes, chair and all."

"I dare say I should do as well as the gardener," said Atlee, who felt that he had been kept in the background long enough, "unless Mrs. Selfert distrusts my capacity."

It was impossible to make any objection to so reasonable an offer without openly insulting the maker, and Rothery Selfert had the extreme pleasure of seeing his wife borne out of the drawing-room on the shoulders of the two younger men, conscious that he himself could not safely have undertaken the task. No man of fifty can expect to excel in everything, but he had not had

the disadvantages of his half-century's experience brought under his notice quite so prominently before, and the sensation was not pleasant.

Lena was put safely into the fly at last, or rather into the pony-carriage, which Florry insisted upon her using in preference to the conveyance retained by Mr. Selfert's forethought; and as she accompanied her to Saltham to speed the parting guest, Mr. Selfert was compelled to follow by himself, just as he had arrived a couple of hours before. So far Lena was reprieved, but when they got to the platform at Saltham, she felt a shudder of apprehension, and knew that her time was come.

"Dear Lena!" said Florry, kissing her even more effusively than was her wont. "It has been so delightful to have you all to ourselves." That this delight had been a good deal interfered with during the last few days by one who had less right to such bliss, Florry did not remember at the moment.

"It is the greatest shame I ever heard of to carry you off like this, and I'm sure you're not fit to sit six hours in a railway carriage!"

"You have no reason to think that the journey will be at all injurious to you?" said Mr. Selfert to his wife, feeling that he was being regarded as selfish and brutal, and scowling at the silly woman who was offending him as silly women usually did. He was almost ashamed of himself for thinking any attempt at self-justification necessary, and the tone in which he spoke robbed it of all its grace.

"I'm just as able to go to London to-night as you are," said Lena, answering Florry, and not her husband, remembering, no doubt that she would have abundance of time in which to talk to him after the train had moved off. And in thirty seconds more Florry was left standing on the Saltham platform by herself, and the husband and wife were alone together for the first time that day.

He had made some pretence of helping to arrange the cushions for her before they started, and had himself taken the foot-warmer from the obsequious porter, who knew quite well who he was. Now that they were absolutely alone, however, he sat in the extreme corner of the carriage, with his hat well over his eyes, and his whole figure relaxed into an attitude of desponding misery. Whether the husband or wife was actually most wretched during the journey to Waterloo, it would be difficult to say.

It was so much worse than Lena had fancied possible, sitting there with him, with the knowledge that she was absolutely in his power, and yet as unable to discern what was in his mind as if he sent nothing but his clothes to typify the majesty of his marital authority, that she found it impossible to adhere to her resolution of saying nothing.

"I hope my letter did not—did not give you the idea that my accident had been anything more than a trifle," she said nervously,

when they had got over twenty miles, at least, of the distance that lay between them and Wimpole Street.

He looked up at her when she spoke, and any faint hopes she might have had that he was going to deal gently and tenderly with her were blown to the winds.

"It is better that there should be no further misunderstanding between us," he answered slowly. "I should not have come down to fetch you—at great personal inconvenience to myself—had there not been other reasons which made it necessary for me to do so. Do you consider that your conduct has been that of a wife who regards her husband's interests—of a truthful, honourable woman?"

The cold bitterness of his tone, even more than the disgrace of the words, stung Lena into a fever of indignation.

"You can, of course, insult me as much as you choose," she said passionately. "I suppose you have almost a right to do so—as I am your wife!"

"It certainly appears necessary that I should remind you of that fact," answered her husband, with almost a sneer. "You do not seem to understand that your conduct has been, to say the least of it, an insult to me."

He spoke with exaggerated deliberation, pausing to choose the words which appeared to him most suitable, as if the fiery passion of the day before had hardened down into cold bright steel, and his wife had never thought him hateful and contemptible till that moment.

"I do not know what you mean," she said proudly. "How can I possibly do so? I only know that you have rendered us both ridiculous in everybody's eyes by your incomprehensible conduct."

It may be doubted whether it would have rendered a Queen's Counsel ridiculous in the eyes of Mrs. Carfax if he had come to Lydcombe riding backwards on a donkey; but Mr. Selfert had not the consolation of feeling that this was the case.

“I have no objection to tell you plainly what my meaning is,” said her husband, “if your own conscience is silent. It is not seemly for a woman in your position to indulge in intimacy with those of her husband’s acquaintances of whom she knows that he disapproves most strongly. It is not seemly on her part to encourage such men to follow her where the protection of her husband’s presence is removed. It is something more than unseemly that she should allow them to visit her without his knowledge, and should suppress all mention of such a scandalous fact in her letters to him, and no woman can be allowed to dishonour her husband’s name by such indiscretions.”

“Dishonour my husband’s name!” repeated Lena slowly, looked incredulously at the man who had vowed not a year before to cherish her as his own flesh. “It is you that are dishonouring your reason by such monstrous thoughts, and dishonouring me by daring to express them in words!” I do not know why

you sent me away from you—how can I tell what imaginary reasons you may have had ! But it was not my doing that I went at all. You had better ask Mr. Atlee himself what brought him to Devonshire, if you want to know ; but those in whose care you had left me naturally supposed that he came as your messenger. They could hardly understand that a husband should be willing to drop his responsibility altogether for a month, whenever it suited him ; but I suppose *you* cannot understand that !”

She had never felt less afraid of the man who was attempting to subdue her than she did at that moment, and seemed to have grown stronger and larger in the greatness of her indignation. Had there been a shade of tenderness in his tone, a look of sympathy in his eye, had his hand even lingered near hers, she would have been all penitence, and softness, and love in a moment.

But it was a first principle in Rothery Selfert's theory of domestic happiness that

no concessions should be made to a wife until she merited them by submission, and his brow was iron-bound in the frost of an impenetrable winter.

"You are talking wildly—and foolishly—and wickedly," he said, endeavouring to silence her by the majesty of his frown, "and will, I hope, regret what you have said when you are less excited."

"It is you that are wicked!" said Lena, with something like a sob of impotence.

"Until that time comes, and you can look at the imprudence of your conduct in a proper spirit," continued her husband, taking no more notice of the interruption than if a rain-drop had been blown in his face from the open window; "it is perhaps better that no more should be said. You will do well to remember that you cannot destroy my happiness without endangering your own, for which I presume you have some regard."

"*My* happiness!" said Lena bitterly. "It

is rather too late in the day for me to think of that now!"

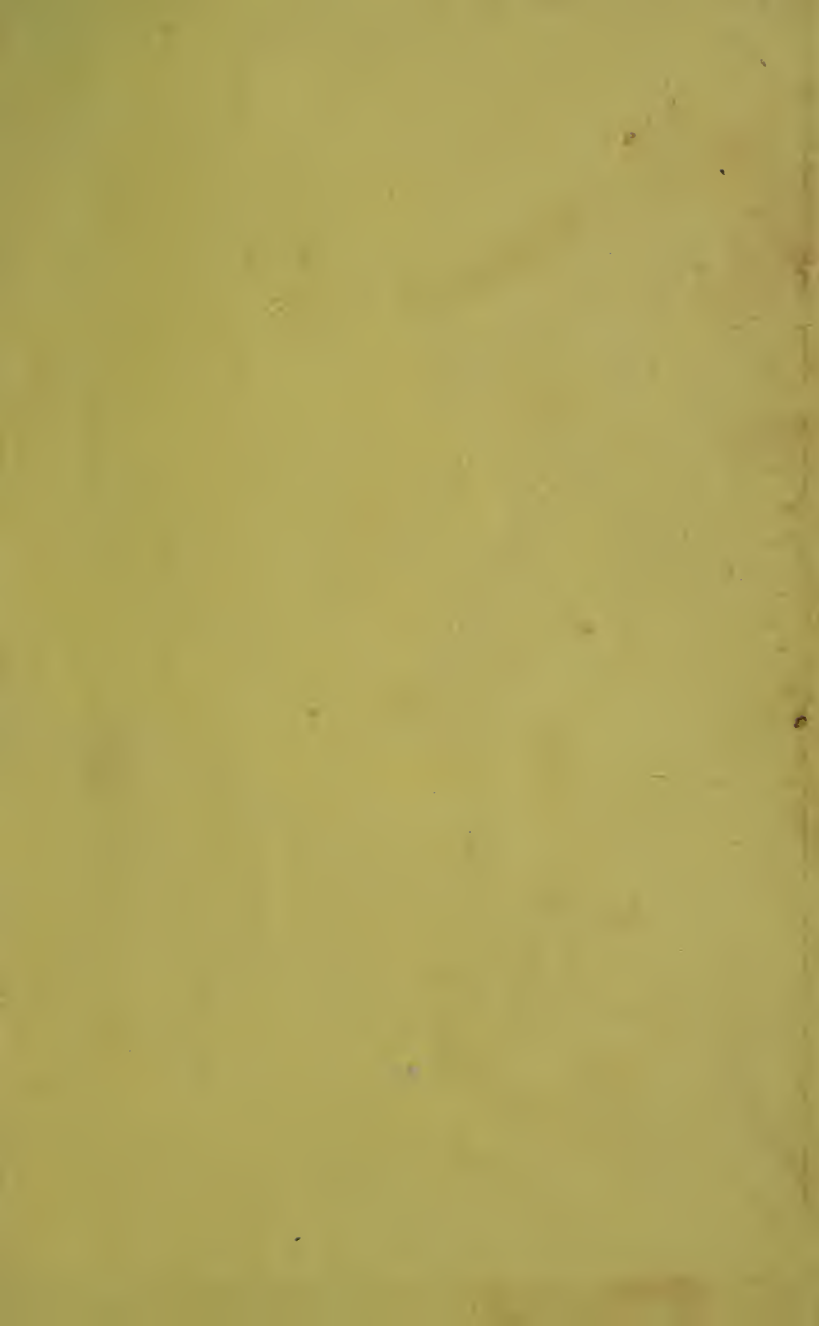
Rothery Selfert, who prided himself upon being superior to the weakness which is peculiar to woman for the last word, took up his *Times*—which he knew almost by heart already—by way of a reply, and left his wife to deliberate upon her own prospects of happiness, and—more immediately—upon the most comfortable position for her injured ankle, by herself.

It is satisfactory to be able to record that he was enabled to purchase the evening papers at Basingstoke, and every one must hope that the *Pall Mall Gazette* contained something that night to solace his irritated feelings. Certainly he felt that he had hardly improved matters by going down to Devonshire.

They reached Waterloo at last without another word having passed between them, and he was compelled to take some part in arranging for Lena's transfer to and from the

carriage he had ordered to be in waiting, and indeed to busy himself about her as if they had been just returning from their honeymoon, until she was safely deposited in her own room. Then he went into the library to confer with Brooking, and it was no doubt a relief to his feelings to find that the Premier had not been inconsiderate enough to select that particular day on which to inform him that her Majesty was unable longer to dispense with the services of a Solicitor-General.

END OF VOL. II.



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